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A PERILOUS SECRET

BY

CHARLES READE

AUTHOR OF

'HARD CASH' 'PUT YOURSELF IN HIS PLACE' 'IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO MEND'
'GRIFFITH GAUNT' ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.



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CONTENTS

OF

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CHAPTER	PAGE
XIV. THE SERPENT	1
XV. THE SECRET IN DANGER	33
XVI. REMINISCENCES—THE FALSE ACCUSER—THE SECRET EXPLODED	59
XVII. LOVERS' QUARRELS	92
XVIII. APOLOGIES	105
XIX. A WOMAN OUTWITS TWO MEN	121
XX. CALAMITY	140
XXI. BURIED ALIVE	150
XXII. REMORSE	164
XXIII. THE THREE DEADLY PERILS	191
XXIV. STRANGE COMPLICATIONS	217
XXV. RETRIBUTION	250
XXVI. STRANGE TURNS	281
XXVII. CURTAIN	296

A PERILOUS SECRET.



CHAPTER XIV.

THE SERPENT.

MONCKTON slipped away at the dawn, and was off to Derby to prepare first-rate disguises.

At Derby, going through the local papers, he found lodgings offered at a farm-house to invalids, fresh milk and eggs, home-made bread, &c. The place was within a few miles of Clifford Hall. Monckton thought this would suit him much better than being too near. When his disguises were ready, he hired a horse and dog-cart by the month, and paid a deposit, and drove to the place in question. He put some shadow under his eyes to look more like an

invalid. He had got used to his own cadaverous tint, so that seemed insufficient.

The farmer's wife looked at him, and hesitated.

‘Well, sir,’ said she, with a faint blush, ‘we takes ’em in to cure, not to——’

‘Not to bury,’ said Monckton. ‘Don’t you be alarmed. I have got no time to die; I’m too busy. Why, I have been much worse than this. I am convalescent now.’

‘Ye don’t say so, sir!’ said she. ‘Well, I see your heart is good’ (the first time he had ever been told that), ‘and so I’ve a mind to risk it.’

Then she quickly clapped on ten shillings a week more for colour, and he was installed. He washed his face, and then the woman conceived hopes of him, and expressed them in rustic fashion. ‘Well,’ said she bluntly, ‘dirt is a disguise. Now I look at you, you have got more mischief to do in the world yet, I do believe.’

‘A deal more, I hope,’ said he.

It now occurred to him, all of a sudden, that really he was not in good health, and that he had difficulties before him which required calm nerves, and that nerves are affected by the stomach. So, not to throw a chance away, he had the sense and the resolution to devote a few days to health and unwholesome meditation.

This is a discordant world: even vices will not always pull the same way. Here was a sinister villain distracted between avarice and revenge, and sore puzzled which way to turn. Of course, he could expose the real parentage of Mary Bartley, and put both Bartley and Hope to shame, and then the Cliffords would make Bartley disgorge the 20,000*l*. But he, Monckton, would not make a shilling by that, and it would be a weak revenge on Bartley, who could now spare 20,000*l*., and no revenge at all on Hope, for Hope was now well-to-do, and would most likely be glad to get his daughter back. Then, on the other hand, he could easily frighten Bartley into giving him 5,000*l*.

to keep dark, but in that case he must forego his vengeance on Hope.

This difficulty had tormented Monckton all along ; but now Mrs. Dawson had revealed another obstacle : Young Clifford and Mary in love with each other. What Mrs. Easton saw as a friend, with her good mother-wit, this man saw in a moment as an enemy, viz., that this new combination dwarfed the 20,000*l.* altogether. Monckton had no idea that his unknown antagonist, Nurse Easton, had married the pair, but the very attachment, as the chatterbox of the 'Dun Cow' described it, was a bitter pill to him. 'Who could have foreseen this?' said he. 'It's devilish.' We did not ourselves intend our readers to feel it so, or we would not have spent so much time over it. But as regards that one adjective, Mr. Monckton is a better authority than we are. He had a document with him that, skilfully used, might make mischief for a time between these lovers. But he foresaw there could be no permanent result without the personal assistance of Mrs. Braham.

That he could have commanded fourteen years ago, but now he felt how difficult it would be. He would have to threaten and torment her almost to madness before she would come down to Derbyshire and declare that this Walter Clifford was the Walter Clifford of the certificate, and that she was his discarded wife. But Monckton was none the less resolved she should come if necessary. Leaving him *variis distractum vitiis*, and weighing every scheme, with its *pros* and *cons*, and, like a panther, crouching and watching before he would make his first spring, we will now bring our other characters up to the same point, and that will not take us long, for during the months we have skipped there were not many events, and Mrs. Dawson has told the reader some of them, and the rest were only detached incidents.

The most important in our opinion were :

1. That Colonel Clifford resumed his determination to marry Julia Clifford to Walter, and pooh-poohed Fitzroy entirely, declaring him to

be five feet nothing, and therefore far below the military standard.

2. That Hope rented a cottage of Walter about three hundred yards from the mine, and not upon the land that was leased to Bartley ; that there was a long detached building hard by, which Walter divided for him, and turned into an office with a large window close to the ground, and a workshop with a doorway and an aperture for a window, but no window nor door.

3. That Hope got more and more uneasy about the 20,000*l.*, and observed to Bartley that they must be robbing *somebody* of it, without the excuse they once had. He, for his part, would work to disgorge his share. Bartley replied that the money would have gone to a convent if he had not saved it from so vile a fate. This said the astute Bartley, because one day Hope, who had his opinions on everything, inveighed against a convent, and said no private prisons ought to exist in a free country. So Bartley's ingenious statement stunned Hope for a minute, but did not satisfy his conscience.

4. Hope went to London for a week, and Mary spent four days with her husband at a hotel near the lake; but not the one held by Mrs. Easton's sister. This change was by advice of Mrs. Easton. On this occasion Mary played the woman. She requested Walter to get her some orange blossoms, and she borrowed a diamond bracelet of Julia, and sat down to dinner with her husband in evening dress, and dazzled him with her lovely arms and bust, and her diamond bracelet and eyes that outshone it. She seemed ever so much larger as well as lovelier, and Walter gazed at her with a sort of loving awe, and she smiled archly at him, and it was the first time she had really enjoyed her own beauty, or even troubled her head much about it. They condensed a honeymoon into these four days, and came home compensated for their patience, and more devoted than ever. But whilst they were away Colonel Clifford fired his attorney at Mr. Bartley, and when Mary came home, Bartley, who had lately connived at the love affair, told Mary this, and forbade her

strictly to hold any more intercourse with Walter Clifford.

This was the state of things when ‘the hare with many friends,’ and only one enemy, returned to his cottage late in the afternoon. But before night everybody knew he had come home, and next morning they were all at him in due order. No sooner was he seated in his workshop, studying the lines of a new machine he was trying to invent, than he was startled from intense thought into the attitude of Hogarth’s enraged musician by cries of ‘Mr. Hope! Mr. Hope! Mr. Hope!’ and there was a little lot of eager applicants. First, a gipsy boy with long black curls and continuous genuflexions, and a fiddle, and doleful complaints that he could not play it, and that it was the fiddle’s fault.

‘Well, it is for once,’ said Hope. ‘Why, you little duffer, don’t you see the bridge is too low?’

He slackened the string, removed the bridge, fitted on a higher one, tuned it, and handed it over.

‘There,’ said he, ‘play us one of the tunes of Egypt—“The Rogue’s March,” eh?—and mizzle.’

The supple Oriental grinned and made obeisances, pretended not to know ‘The Rogue’s March’ (to the hen-house), and went off playing ‘Johnny Comes Marching Home (Bridewell, to wit).

Then did Miss Clifford’s French maid trip forward smirking with a parasol to mend: ‘*Désolée de vous déranger, Monsieur Hoppe, mais notre demoiselle est au désespoir: oh, ces parasols anglais!*’

‘*Connu,*’ said Hope, ‘*voyons ça;*’ and in a minute repaired the article, and the girl spread it, and went off wriggling and mincing with it, so that there was a pronounced horse-laugh at her *minauderies*.

Then advanced a rough young English nurse out of a farm-house, with a child that could just toddle. She had left an enormous doll with Hope for repairs, and the child had given her no peace for the last week. Luckily,

the doll was repaired, and handed over. The mite, in whose little bosom maternal feelings had been excited, insisted on carrying her child. The consequence was that, at about the third step, they rolled over one another, and to spectators at a little distance it was hard to say which was the parent and which the offspring. Then the strapping lass in charge seized them roughly, and at the risk of dislocating their little limbs, tossed into the air and caught one on each of her own robust arms, and carried them off, stupidly irritated—for want of a grain of humour at the good-natured laugh this caused, and looking as if she would like to knock their little heads together.

Under cover of this an old man, in a broad hat and seemingly infirm, crept slowly by and looked keenly at Hope, but made no application. Only, while taking stock of Hope, his eyes flashed wickedly, and much too brightly for so old a man as he appeared. He did not go far ; he got behind a tree, and watched the premises. Then a genuine old man and feeble came and

brought Hope his clock to mend. Hope wound it up, and it went to perfection. The old man had been a stout fellow when Hope was a boy, but now he was weak, especially in the upper story. Hope saw at once that the young folk had sent him there for a joke, and he did not approve of it.

‘Gaffer,’ said he, ‘this will want repairing every eight days; but don’t you come here any more; I’ll call on you every week, and repair it for auld lang syne.’

Whilst he toddled away, and Hope retired behind his lathe to study his model in peace, Monckton raged at the sight of him and his popularity.

‘Ay,’ said he, ‘you are a genius. You can model a steam-engine or mend a doll, and you outwitted me, and gave me fourteen years. But you will find me as ingenious as you at one thing, and that’s revenge.’

And now a higher class of visitors began to find their way to the general favourite. The first was a fair young lady of surpassing beauty.

She strolled pensively down the green turf, cast a hasty glance in at the workshop, and, not seeing Hope, concluded he was a little tired after his journey, and had not yet arrived. She strolled slowly down then, and seated herself in a large garden chair, stuffed, that Hope had made, and placed there for Colonel Clifford. That worthy frequented the spot because he had done so for years, and because it was a sweet, turfy slope; and there was a wonderful beech-tree his father had made him plant when he was five years old. It had a gigantic silvery stem, and those giant branches which die crippled in a beech wood, but really belong to the isolated tree, as one Virgil discovered before we were born. Mary Bartley then lowered her parasol, and settled into the Colonel's chair under the shade *patulæ fagi*—of the wide-spreading beech-tree.

She sat down and sighed. Monckton eyed her from his lurking-place, and made a shrewd guess who she was, but resolved to know.

Presently Hope caught a glimpse of her,

and came forward and leaned out of the window to enjoy the sight of her. He could do that unobserved, for he was a long way behind her at a sharp angle.

He was still a widower and this his only child, and lovely as an angel; and he had seen her grow into ripe loveliness from a sick girl. He had sinned for her and saved her; he had saved her again from a more terrible death. He doted on her, and it was always a special joy to him when he could gloat on her unseen. Then he had no need to make up an artificial face and hide his adoration from her.

But soon a cloud came over his face and his paternal heart. He knew she had a lover; and she looked like a girl who was waiting pensively for him. She had not come there for him whom she knew only as her devoted friend. At this thought the poor father sighed.

Mary's quick senses caught that, and she turned her head, and her sweet face beamed:

‘You *are* there, after all, Mr. Hope.’

Hope was delighted. Why, it was him she had come to see, after all. He came down to her directly, radiant, and then put on a stiff manner he often had to wear, out of fidelity to Bartley, who did not deserve it.

‘This is early for you to be out, Miss Bartley.’

‘Of course it is,’ said she. ‘But I know it is the time of day when you are kind to anybody that comes, and mend all their rubbish for them, and I could kill them for their impudence in wasting your time so. And I am as bad as the rest. For here I am wasting your time in my turn. Yes, dear Mr. Hope, you are so kind to everybody and mend their things, I want you to be kind to me and mend—my prospects for me.’

Hope’s impulse was to gather into his arms and devour with kisses this sweet specimen of womanly tenderness, frank inconsistency, *naïveté*, and archness.

As he could not do that, he made himself extra stiff.

‘Your prospects, Miss Bartley! Why, they are brilliant. Heiress to all the growing wealth and power around you.’

‘Wealth and power!’ said the girl. ‘What is the use of them, if our hearts are to be broken? Oh, Mr. Hope, papa is so unkind. He has forbidden me to speak to him.’ Then, gravely, ‘That command comes too late.’

‘I fear it does,’ said Hope. ‘I have long suspected something.’

‘Suspected?’ said Mary, turning pale. ‘What?’

‘That you and Walter Clifford——’

‘Yes,’ said Mary, trembling inwardly, but commanding her face.

‘Are—engaged.’

Mary drew a long breath. ‘What makes you think so?’ said she, looking down.

‘Well, there is a certain familiarity—no, that is too strong a word; but there is more ease between you than there was. Ever since I came back from Belgium I have seen that the

preliminaries of courtship were over, and you two looked on yourselves as one.'

'Mr. Hope,' said this good, arch girl, and left off panting, 'you are a terrible man. Papa is eyes and no eyes. You frighten me; but not very much, for you would not watch me so closely if you did not love me—a little.'

'Not a little, Miss Bartley.'

'Mary, please.'

'Mary. I have seen you a sickly child; I have been anxious—who would not? I have seen you grow in health and strength, and every virtue.'

'And seen me tumble into the water and frighten you out of your senses; and there's nothing one loves like a downright pest, especially if she loves us; and I do love you, Mr. Hope, dearly, dearly, and I promise to be a pest to you all your days. Ah, here he comes at last.' She made two eager steps to meet him; then she said, 'Oh! I forgot,' and came back again, and looked prodigiously demure and innocent.

Walter came on with his usual rush, crying, 'Mary, how good of you !'

Mary put her fingers in her ears. 'No, no, no ; we are forbidden to communicate.' Then, imitating a stiff man of business—for she was a capital mimic when she chose—'any communication you may wish to honour me with must be addressed to this gentleman, Mr. Hope ; he will convey it to me, and it shall meet with all the attention it deserves.'

Walter laughed and said, 'That's ingenuous.'

'Of course it is ingenuous,' said Mary subtly. 'That's my character to a fault.'

'Well, young people,' said Hope, 'I am not sure that I have time to repeat verbal communications to keen ears that heard them. And I think I can make myself more useful to you. Walter, your father has set his lawyer on to Mr. Bartley, and what is the consequence ? Mr. Bartley forbids Mary to speak to you ; and the next thing will be a summons, lawsuit, and a great defeat, and loss to your father and you. Mr. Bartley sent me the lawyer's letter. He

hopes to get out of a clear contract by pleading a surprise. Now you must go to the lawyer—it is no use arguing with your father in his present heat—and you must assure him there has been no surprise. Why, I called on Colonel Clifford years ago, and told him there was coal on that farm; and I almost went on my knees to him to profit by it.’

‘You don’t say that, Mr. Hope?’

‘I do say it, and I shall have to swear it. You may be sure Mr. Bartley will subpœna me, if this wretched squabble gets into court.’

‘But what did my father say to you?’

‘He was kind and courteous to me. I was poor as a rat, and dusty with travel—on foot; and he was a fine gentleman, as he always is, when he is not in too great a passion. He told me more than one landowner had wasted money in this county groping for coal. He would not waste his money nor dirty his fingers. But he thanked me for my friendly zeal, and rewarded me with ten shillings.’

‘Oh!’ cried Walter, and hid his face in his

hands. As for Mary, she put her hand gently but quietly on Hope's shoulder, as if to protect him from such insults.

‘Why, children,’ said Hope, pleased at their sympathy, but too manly to hunt for it, ‘it was more than he thought the information worth, and I assure you it was a blessed boon to me. I had spent my last shilling, and there I was trapesing across the island on a wild-goose chase with my reaping-hook and my fiddle; and my poor little Grace, that I—that I——’

Mary's hand went a moment to his other shoulder, and she murmured through her tears, ‘You have got *me*.’

Then Hope was happy again, and, indeed, the simplest woman can find in a moment the very word that is balm of Gilead to a sorrowful man.

However, Hope turned it off and continued his theme. The jury, he said, would pounce on that ten shillings as the Colonel's true estimate of his coal, and he would figure in the case as a dog in the manger who grudged

Bartley the profits of a risky investment he had merely sneered at and not opposed, until it turned out well ; and also disregarded the interests of the little community to whom the mine was a boon. ‘No,’ said Hope ; ‘tell your lawyer that I am Bartley’s servant, but love equity. I have proposed to Bartley to follow a wonderful seam of coal under Colonel Clifford’s park. We have no business there. So, if the belligerents will hear reason, I will make Bartley pay a royalty on every ton that comes to the surface from any part of the mine ; and that will be 1,200*l.* a year to the Cliffords. Take this to the lawyer, and tell him to unfix that hero’s bayonet, or he will charge at the double and be the death of his own money—and yours.’

Walter threw up his hands with amazement and admiration. ‘What a head !’ said he.

‘Fiddlededee !’ said Mary ; ‘what a heart !’

‘In a word, a phoenix,’ said Hope drily. ‘Praise is sweet, especially behind one’s back. So pray go on, unless you have something

better to say to each other ;' and Hope retired briskly into his office. But when the lovers took him at his word, and began to strut up and down hand in hand, and murmur love's music into each other's ears, he could not take his eyes off them, and his thoughts were sad. She had only known that young fellow a few months, yet she loved him passionately, and he would take her away from her father before she even knew all that father had done and suffered for her. When the revelation did come she would perhaps be a wife and a mother, and then even that revelation would fall comparatively flat.

Besides his exceptional grief, he felt the natural pang of a father at the prospect of resigning her to a husband. Hard is the lot of parents—and, above all, of a parent with one child whom he adores. Many other creatures love their young tenderly, and their young leave them. But then the infancy and youth of those creatures are so short. In a few months the young shift for themselves, forget-

ting and forgotten. But with our young the helpless periods of infancy and youth are so long. Parental anxiety goes through so many trials, and so various, and they all strike roots into the parent's heart. Yet after twenty years of love and hope and fear comes a handsome young fellow, a charming highwayman to a parent's eye, and whisks her away after two months' courtship. Then, O ye young, curb for a moment your blind egotism, and feel a little for the parents who have felt so much for you! You rather like William Hope, so let him help you to pity your own parents. See his sad face as he looks at the love he is yet too unselfish to discourage. To save that tender root, a sickly child, he transplanted it from his own garden, and still tended it with loving care for many a year. Another gathers the flower. He watched and tended and trembled over the tender nestling. The young bird is trying her wings before his eyes; soon she will spread them, and fly away to a newer nest and a younger bosom.

In this case, however, the young people had their troubles too, and their pretty courtship was soon interrupted by an unwelcome and unexpected visitor, who, as a rule, avoided that part, for the very reason that Colonel Clifford frequented it. However, he came there to-day to speak to Hope. Mr. Bartley, for he it was, would have caught the lovers if he had come silently; but he was talking to a pitman as he came, and Mary's quick ears heard his voice round the corner.

‘Papa!’ cried she. ‘Oh, don’t let him see us! Hide!’

‘Where?’

‘Anywhere—in here—quick!’ and she flew into Hope's workshop, which indeed offered great facilities for hiding. However, to make sure, they crouched behind the lathe and a huge plank of beautiful mahogany Hope was very proud of.

As soon as they were hidden, Mary began to complain in a whisper. ‘This comes of our clandestine m——. Our very life is a false-

hood ; concealment is torture—and degradation.’

‘ I don’t feel it. I call this good fun.’

‘ Oh, Walter ! Good fun ! For shame ! Hush !’

Bartley bustled on to the green, called Hope out, and sat down in Colonel Clifford’s chair. Hope came to him, and Bartley, who had in his hand some drawings of the strata in the coal mine, handed the book to Hope, and said, ‘ I quite agree with you. That is the seam to follow : there’s a fortune in it.’

‘ Then you are satisfied with me ?’

‘ More than satisfied.’

‘ I have something to ask in return.’

‘ I am not likely to say no, my good friend,’ was the cordial reply.

‘ Thank you. Well, then, there is an attachment between Mary and young Clifford.’

Bartley was on his guard directly.

‘ Her happiness is at stake. That gives me a right to interfere, and say, “ Be kind to her.” ’

‘Am I not kind to her? Was any parent ever kinder? But I must be wise as well as kind. Colonel Clifford can disinherit his son.’

At this point the young people ventured to peep and listen, taking advantage of the circumstance that both Hope and Bartley were at some distance, with their backs turned to the workshop.

So they both heard Hope say :

‘Withdraw your personal opposition to the match, and the other difficulty can be got over. If you want to be kind to a young woman, it is no use feeding her ambition and her avarice, for these are a man’s idols. A woman’s is love.’

Mary wafted the speaker a furtive kiss.

‘To enrich that dear child after your death, thirty years hence, and break her heart in the flower of her youth, is to be unkind to her ; and if you are unkind to her, our compact is broken.’

‘Unkind to her?’ said Bartley. ‘What male parent has ever been more kind, more vigilant? Sentimental weakness is another matter. My

affection is more solid. Can I oblige you in anything that is business?’

‘Mr. Bartley,’ said Hope, ‘you cannot divert me from the more important question : business is secondary to that dear girl’s happiness. However, I have more than once asked you to tell me who is the loser of that large sum which, as you and I have dealt with it, has enriched you and given me a competence.’

‘That’s my business,’ said Bartley sharply, ‘for you never fingered a shilling of it. So if the pittance I pay you for conducting my business burns your pocket, why, send it to Rothschild.’

And having made this little point, Bartley walked away to escape further comment, and Hope turned on his heel and walked into his office, and out at the back-door directly, and proceeded to his duties in the mine ; but he was much displeased with Bartley, and his looks showed it.

The coast lay clear. The lovers came cautiously out, and silently too, for what they had heard puzzled them not a little.

Mary came out first, and wore a very meditative look. She did not say a word till they got to some little distance from the workshop. Then she half turned her head toward Walter, who was behind her, and said, 'I suppose you know we have done a contemptible thing—listening?'

'Well,' said Walter, 'it wasn't good form; but,' added he, 'we could hardly help it.'

'Of course not,' said Mary. 'We have been guilty of a concealment that drives us into holes and corners, and all manner of meannesses must be expected to follow. Well, we *have* listened, and I am very glad of it; for it is plain we are not the only people who have got secrets. Now tell me, please, what does it all mean?'

'Well, Mary,' said Walter, 'to tell the truth, it is all Greek to me, except about the money. I think I could give a guess where that came from.'

'There, now!' cried Mary; 'that is so like you gentlemen. Money — money — money! Never mind the money part; leave that to take

care of itself. Can you explain what Mr. Hope said to papa about *me*? Mr. Hope is a very superior man, and papa's adviser *in business*. But, after all, he is in papa's employment. Papa *pays* him. Then how comes he to care more about my happiness than papa does—and say so?’

‘Why, you begged him to intercede.’

‘Yes,’ said Mary, ‘but not to threaten papa; not to say, “If you are unkind to Mary, our compact is broken.”’

Then she pondered awhile; then she turned to Walter, and said:

‘What sort of compact is that—a compact between a father and another gentleman that a father shall not be unkind to his own daughter? Did you ever hear of such a thing?’

‘I can't say I ever did.’

‘Did you ever hear tell of such a thing?’

‘Well, now you put it to me, I don't think I ever did.’

‘And yet you could run off about money. What's money! This compact is a great mys-

tery. It's my business from this hour to fathom that mystery. Please let me think.'

Mary's face now began to show great power and intensity; her eyes seemed to veil themselves, and to turn down their glances inward.

Walter was struck with the intensity of that fair brow, those remarkable eyes, and that beautiful face; they seemed now to be all strung up to concert pitch. He kept silent and looked at his wife with a certain reverence, for, to tell the truth, she had something of the Pythian priestess about her, when she concentrated her whole mind on any one thing in this remarkable manner. At last the oracle spoke:

'Mr. Hope has been deceiving me with some good intention. He pretends to be subservient to papa, but he is the master. How he comes to be master I don't know, but so it is, Walter. If it came to a battle royal, Mr. Hope would side, not with papa, but with me.'

'That's important, if true,' said Walter drily.

'It's true,' said Mary, 'and it's important.'

Then she turned suddenly round on him : ‘ How did you feel when you ran into that workshop, and we both crouched and hid like criminals or slaves ? ’

‘ Well,’ said Walter, hanging his head, ‘ to tell the truth, I took a comic view of the business.’

‘ I can’t do that,’ said Mary. ‘ I respect my husband, and can’t bear him to hide from the face of any mortal man ; and I am proud of my own love, and indignant to think that I have condescended to hide it.’

‘ It is a shame,’ said Walter, ‘ and I hope we sha’n’t have to hide it much longer. Oh, bother, how unfortunate ! here’s my father ! What are we to do ?

‘ I’ll tell you,’ said Mary resolutely. ‘ You must speak to him at once, and win him over to our side. Tell him Julia is going to marry Percy Fitzroy on the first of next month ; then tell him all that Mr. Hope said you were to tell the lawyer ; and then tell him what you have made me believe, that you love me better than

your life, and that I love you better still, and that no power *can* part us. If you can soften him, Mr. Hope shall soften papa.'

'But if he is too headstrong to be softened?' faltered Walter.

'Then,' said Mary, 'you must defy my papa, and I shall defy yours.'

After a moment's thought she said :

'Walter, I shall stay here till he sees me and you together; then he won't be able to run off about his mines, and his lawsuits, and such rubbishy things. His attention will be attracted to our love, and so you will have it out with him, whilst I retire a little way—not far—and meditate upon Mr. Hope's strange words, and ponder over many things that have happened within my recollection.'

True to this policy, the spirited girl waited till Colonel Clifford came on the green, and then made Walter as perfect a courtesy as ever graced a minuet at the court of Louis le Grand.

Walter took off his hat to her with chivalric

grace and respect. Colonel Clifford drew up in a stiff military attitude, which flavoured rather of the parade or the field of battle than the court either of the great monarch or of little Cupid.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SECRET IN DANGER.

‘HUM!’ said the Colonel drily; ‘a petticoat!’

‘*Et cetera*,’ suggested Walter, meekly; and we think he was right, for a petticoat has never in our day been the only garment worn by females, nor even the most characteristic; fishermen wear petticoats, and don’t wear bonnets.

‘Who is she, sir?’ asked the grim Colonel.

‘Your niece, father,’ said Walter, mellifluously, ‘and the most beautiful girl in Derbyshire.’

The Colonel snorted, but didn’t condescend to go into the question of beauty.

‘Why did my niece retire at sight of me?’ was his insidious inquiry.

‘Well,’ said Walter, meekly, ‘the truth is,

some mischief-making fool has been telling her that you have lost all natural affection for your dead sister's child.'

The stout Colonel staggered for a moment, snorted, and turned it off: 'You and she are very often together, it seems.'

'All the better for me,' said Walter, stoutly.

'And all the worse for me,' retorted the Colonel. And as men gravitate toward their leading grievance, he went off at a tangent, 'What do you think my feelings must be, to see my son, my only son, spooning the daughter of my only enemy; of a knave who got on my land on pretence of farming it, but instead of that he burrowed under the soil like a mole, sir; and now the place is defiled with coal dust, the roads are black, the sheep are black, the daisies and buttercups are turning black? There's a smut on your nose, Walter. I forbid you to spoon his daughter, upon pain of a father's curse. My real niece, Julia, is a lady and an heiress, and the beauty of the county. She is the girl for you.'

‘And how about the seventh commandment?’ inquired Walter, putting his hands in his pockets.

‘Oh,’ said the Colonel, indifferently, ‘you must mind your eye, like other husbands. But in our walk of life, it’s the man’s fault if the woman falls out of the ranks.’

‘That’s not what I mean,’ said Walter.

‘What do you mean, then, if you mean anything at all?’

‘I mean this, father. She marries Percy Fitzroy in three weeks; so if I fix my affections on her up to the date of the wedding, shall I not be tempted to continue, and will not a foolish attachment to another man’s sweetheart end in a vicious attachment to another man’s wife?’

Once more was the Colonel staggered for a moment, and, oh—as the ladies say—is it not gratifying to find that where honest reasons go for nothing, humbug can obtain a moment’s hearing? The Colonel admitted there was something in that; but even humbug could

not divert him long from his mania. ‘The only thing to be done,’ said he, ‘is to cut him out between this and then. Why, he stands five feet nothing.’

‘That’s the advantage he has over me,’ suggested Walter; ‘she is five feet eight or thereabouts, so he is just the height of her heart.’

The Colonel burst out laughing. ‘You are no fool,’ said he; ‘that’s the second good thing you have said these three years. I forget what the other was, but I remember it startled me at the time. You are a wit, and you will cut out that manikin or you are no son of mine.’

‘Don’t say that, father,’ said Walter; ‘and cutting out, why that’s a naval operation, not military. I am not the son of an admiral.’

‘No equivocation, sir; the forces assist one another at a pinch.’

‘How can I cut him out?—there’s no room, he is tied to her apron strings.’

‘Untie him, then.’

At this moment, whether because Hope

attracted everybody in the course of the day or because talking about people draws them to the place by some subtle agency, who should appear in sight but Miss Julia Clifford, and little Fitzroy wooing her so closely that really he did seem tied to her apron string.

‘There,’ said Walter, ‘now use your eyes, father; look at this amorous pair. Do you really think it is possible for a fellow to untie those two?’

‘Quite possible,’ said the Colonel. ‘Walter,’ said he, sententiously, ‘there’s a little word in the English language which is one of the biggest. I will spell it to you, T—R—Y. Nobody knows what he can do till he gives that word a fair trial. It was far more impossible to scale the rock of Gibraltar, but our infantry did it; and there we are, with all Europe grinding their teeth at us. What’s a woman compared with Gibraltar? However, as you seem to be a bit of a muff, I’ll stand sentinel whilst you cut him out.’

The Colonel then retired into a sort of am-

buscade—at least he mingled with a small clump of three Scotch firs, and stood amongst them so rectilinear he might have passed for the fourth stem. Walter awaited the arrival of the foe, but in a spirit which has seldom conducted men to conquest and glory, for if the English infantry had deviated so far from their insular habits as to admire the Spaniards, you may be sure that Gibraltar rock at this day would be a part of the Continent, and not a detached fragment of Great Britain. In a word, Walter, at sight of the lovers, was suddenly seized with sentimental sympathy; they both seemed to him so beautiful in their way. The man was small, but his heart was not; he stuck to the woman like a man, and poured hot love into her ears, and almost lost the impediment in his speech. The woman pretended to be cooler, but she half turned her head toward him, and her half-closed eyes and heightened colour showed she was drinking every word. Her very gaiety, though it affected nonchalance, revealed happiness to such as can read below the surface of her sex. The Colonel's

treacherous ally, after gazing at them with marked approval, and saying, 'I couldn't do it better myself,' which was surely a great admission for a lover to make, slipped quietly into Hope's workshop not to spoil sport—a juvenile idea which we recommend to older persons, and to such old maids as have turned sour. The great majority of old maids are match-makers, whatever cant may keep saying and writing to the contrary.

'No wonder at all,' said Percy, who was evidently in the middle of some amorous speech; 'you are the goddess of my idolatry.'

'What ardent expressions you do use!' said Julia, smiling.

'Of c—course I do; I'm over head and ears in love.'

Julia surveyed his proportions, and said: 'That's not very deep.'

But Percy had got used to this kind of wit, and did not mind it now. He replied with dignity: 'It's as deep—as the ocean, and as imp—per—t—t—tur—bable. Confound it! there's your cousin.'

‘You are not jealous of him, Mr. Imperturbable, are you?’ asked Julia, slyly.

‘Jealous?’ said Percy, changing colour rather suspiciously. ‘Certainly not. Hang him!’

Walter, finding he was discovered, and feeling himself in the way, came out at the back behind them, and said, ‘Never mind me, you two; far be it from me to deprive the young of their innocent amusements.’

Whilst making this little speech he was going off on the points of his toes, intending to slip off to Clifford Hall, and tell his father that both cutting out and untying had proved impossible, but, to his horror, the Colonel emerged from his ambuscade and collared him. Then took place two short cotemporaneous dialogues:

Julia. ‘I’d never marry a jealous man.’

Percy. ‘I never could be jealous. I’m above it. Impossible for a nature like mine to be jealous.’

Col. Clifford. ‘Well, why don’t you cut him out?’

Walter. ‘They seem so happy without it.’

Col. Clifford. ‘You are a muff. I’ll do it for you. Forward!’

Colonel Clifford then marched down and seated himself in the chair Hope had made for him.

Julia saw him, and whispered Percy : ‘ Ah ! here’s Uncle Clifford. He is going to marry me to Walter. Never mind—you are not jealous.’

Percy turned yellow.

‘ Well,’ said Colonel Clifford to all whom it might concern, ‘ this certainly is the most comfortable chair in England. These fools of upholsterers never make the bottom of the chair long enough, but Mr. Hope has made this to run under a gentleman’s knees and support him. He’s a clever fellow. Julia, my dear, there’s a garden chair for you ; come and sit down by me.’

Julia gave a sly look at Percy, and went to Colonel Clifford. She kissed him on the forehead to soften the coming negative, and said : ‘ To tell you the truth, dear uncle, I have promised to go down a coal mine. See ! I’m dressed accordingly.’

‘ Go down a coal mine !’ said the Colonel,

contemptuously. ‘What fool put that idea in your head?’

Fitzroy strutted forward like a bantam-cock: ‘I did, sir. Coal is a very interesting product.’

‘Ay, to a cook.’

‘To every English g—gentleman.’

‘I disown that imputation for one.’

‘Of being an English g—gentleman?’

There was a general titter at this sly hit.

‘No, sir,’ said the Colonel, angrily—‘of taking an interest in coal.’

‘Well, but,’ said Percy, with a few slight hesitations, ‘not to t—take an interest in c—coal is not to take an interest in the n—nation, for this n—nation is g—great, not by its p—powerful fleet, nor its little b—b—bit of an army—’

A snort from the Colonel.

‘—nor its raw m—militia, but by its m—m—manufactures; these depend on machines that are driven by steam-power, and the steam-engines are coal-fed, and were made in coal-fed

furnaces ; our machines do the work of five hundred million hands, and you see coal keeps them going. The machinery will be imitated by other nations, but those nations cannot create coal-fields. Should those ever be exhausted, our ingenuity will be imitated by larger nations, our territory will remain small, and we shall be a second-rate Power ; so I say that every man who reads and thinks about his own c—country ought to be able to say, “ I have been d—d—down a coal mine.” ’

‘ Well,’ said the Colonel, loftily, and ‘ can’t you say you have been down a coal mine? I could say that and sit here. Well, sir, you have been reading the newspapers, and learning them off by heart as if they were the Epistle and Gospel ; of course *you* must go down a coal mine ; but if you do, have a little mercy on the fair, and go down by yourself. In the meanwhile, Walter, you can take your cousin and give her a walk in the woods, and show her the primroses.’

Now Julia was surprised and pleased at

Percy's good sense, and she did not care whether he got it from the newspapers or where he got it from ; it was there ; so she resisted, and said, coldly and firmly, ' Thank you, uncle, but I don't want the primroses, and Walter does not want me. Come, Percy *dear* ; ' and so she marched off ; but she had not gone many steps before, having a great respect for old age, she ordered Percy, in a whisper, to make some apology to her uncle.

Percy did not much like the commission. However, he went back, and said, very civilly : ' This is a free country, but I am afraid I have been a little too free in expressing my opinion ; let me hope you are not annoyed with me.'

' I am never annoyed with a fool,' said the implacable Colonel.

This was too much for any little man to stand :

' That is why you are always on such good terms with yourself,' said Percy, as red as a turkey-cock.

The Colonel literally stared with amazement.

Hitherto it had been for him to deliver bayonet thrusts, not to receive them.

Julia pounced on her bantam-cock, and with her left hand literally pulled him off the premises, and shook her right fist at him till she got him out of sight of the foe ; then she kissed him on both cheeks, and burst out laughing ; and, indeed, she was so tickled that she kept laughing at intervals, whether the immediate subject of the conversation was grave or gay. It is hard not to laugh when a very little fellow cheeks a very big one. Even Walter, though he admired as well as loved his father, hung his head, and his shoulders shook with suppressed risibility. Colonel Clifford detected him in this posture, and in his wrath gave his chair a whack with his staff that brought Master Walter to the position of a private soldier when the drill-sergeant cries ‘ ATTENTION ! ’

‘ Did you hear that, ir ? ’ said he.

‘ I did,’ said Walter : ‘ cheeky little beggar. But you know, father, you were rather hard

upon him before his sweetheart, and “a little pot is soon hot.”’

‘There was nothing to be hot about,’ said the Colonel, naïvely ; ‘but that is neither here nor there. You are ten times worse than he is. He is only a prating, pedantic puppy, but you are a muff, sir, a most unmitigated muff, to stand there mum-chance and let such an article as that carry off the prize.’

‘Oh, father,’ said Walter, ‘why will you not see that the prize is a living woman, a woman with a will of her own, and not a French eagle, or the figure-head of a ship? Now do listen to reason.’

‘Not a word,’ said the Colonel, marching off.

‘But excuse me,’ said Walter, ‘I have another thing far more important to speak to you about : this unhappy lawsuit.’

‘That’s no business of yours, and I don’t want your opinion of it ; there is no more fight in you than there is in a hen sparrow. I decline your company and your pacific

twaddle; I have no patience with a muff;’ and the Colonel marched off, leaving his son planted there, as the French say.

Walter, however, was not long alone; the interview had been watched from a distance by Mary. She now stole noiselessly on the scene, and laid her white hand upon her husband’s shoulder before he was aware of her. The sight of her was heaven to him, but her first question clouded his happy face.

‘Well, dear, have you propitiated him?’

Walter hung his head sorrowfully, and said hardly anything.

‘He has been blustering at me all the time, and insists upon my cutting out Percy whether I can or not, and marrying Julia whether she chooses or not.’

‘Then we must do what I said. Indeed, there is no other course. We must own the truth; concealment and deceit will not mend our folly.’

‘Oh, hang it, Mary, don’t call it folly.’

‘Forgive me, dear, but it was the height of

folly. Not that I mean to throw the blame on you—that would be ungenerous ; but the truth is you had no business to marry me, and I had no business to marry you. Only think—me—Mary Bartley—a clandestine marriage, and then our going to the Lakes again, and spending our honeymoon together just like other couples—the recklessness—the audacity ! Oh, what happiness it was !’

Walter very naturally pounced upon this unguarded and naïve conclusion of Mary’s self-reproaches. ‘Yes,’ said he, eagerly ; ‘let us go there again next week.’

‘Not next week, not next month, not next year, nor ever again until we have told all the world.’

‘Well, Mary,’ said Walter, ‘it’s for you to command and me to obey. I said so before, and I say so now, if you are not ashamed of me, how can I be ashamed of you ; you say the word, and I will tell my father at dinner-time, before Julia Clifford and John Baker, and request them to tell everybody they know, that

I am married to a woman I adore, and there is nobody I care for on earth as I do for her, and nothing I value compared with her love and her esteem.'

Mary put her arm tenderly around her husband's neck; and now it was with her as it is often with generous and tender-hearted women, when all opposition to their wishes is withdrawn, they begin to see the other side.

'My dearest,' said Mary, 'I couldn't bear you to sacrifice your prospects for me.'

'Why, Mary,' said Walter, 'what would my love be worth if it shrank from self-sacrifice? I really think I should feel more pleasure than pain if I gave up friends, kindred, hope, everything that is supposed to make life pleasant for you.'

'And so would I for you,' said Mary; 'and oh, Walter, women have presentiments, and something tells me that fate has great trials in store for you or for me, perhaps for both. Yes, you are right, the true measure of love must be self-sacrifice, and if there is to be self-

sacrifice, oh, let the self-sacrifice fall on me ; for I cannot think any man can love a woman quite so deeply as I love you—my darling.’

He had only time to draw her sweet forehead to his bosom, whilst her arm encircled his neck, when in came an ordinary love by way of contrast.

Julia Clifford and Percy came in, walking three yards apart : Percy had untied the apron strings without Walter’s assistance.

‘ Ah,’ said she, ‘ you two are not like us. I am ashamed to interrupt you ; but they would not let us go down the mine without an order from Mr. Hope. Really, I think Mr. Hope is king of this country. Not that we have wasted our time, for he has been quarrelling with me all the way there and back.’

‘ Oh, Mr. Fitzroy !’ said Mary Bartley.

‘ Miss Bartley,’ said Percy, very civilly, ‘ I never q—q—quarrel, I merely dis—distinguish between right and wrong. I shall make you the judge. I gave her a di—diamond br—bracelet which came down from my

ancestors ; she did me the honour to accept it, and she said it should never leave her day nor night.'

'Oh,' cried Julia, 'that I never did. I cannot afford to stop my circulation altogether ; it's much too little.' Then she flew at him suddenly. 'Your ancestors were pigmies.'

Percy drew himself up to his full height, and defied the insinuation. 'They were giants, in chain armour,' said he.

'What,' said Julia, without a moment's hesitation, 'the ladies ? Or was it the knights that wore bracelets ?'

Some French writer says, 'The tongue of a woman is her sword,' and Percy Fitzroy found it so. He could no more answer this sudden thrust than he could win the high leap at Lillie Bridge. He stood quivering as if a polished rapier had really been passed clean through him.

Mary was too kind-hearted to laugh in his face, but couldn't help turning her head away and giggling a little.

At last Percy recovered himself enough to say :

‘The truth is you have gone and given it to somebody else.’

‘Oh, you wicked—bad-hearted—you that couldn’t be jealous!’

By this time Percy was himself again, and said, with some reason, that ‘invectives were not arguments. Produce the bracelet.’

‘And so I can,’ said Julia, stoutly. ‘Give me time.’

‘Oh,’ said Percy, ‘if it’s a mere question of time, there is no more to be said. You’ll find the bracelet in time, and in time I shall feel once more that confidence in you which induced me to confide to you as to another self that precious family relic, which I value more than any other material object in the world.’ Then Percy, whose character seemed to have changed, retired with stiff dignity and an air of indomitable resolution.

Neither Julia nor Mary had ever seen him like that before. Julia was unaffectedly distressed.

‘Oh, Mary, why did I ever lend it to you?’

Now Mary knew very well where the bracelet was, but she was ashamed to say; she stammered and said, ‘You know, dear, it is too small, much too small, and my arm is bigger than yours.’

‘There!’ said Julia; ‘you have broken the clasp!’

Mary coloured up to the eyes at her own disingenuousness, and said, hastily, ‘But I’ll have it mended directly; I’ll return it to-morrow at the latest.’

‘I shall be wretched till you do,’ said Julia, eagerly. ‘I suppose you know what I want it for now?’

‘Why,’ said Mary, ‘of course I do: to soothe his wounded feelings.’

‘Soothe *his* feelings!’ cried Julia, scornfully; ‘and how about mine? No; the only thing I want it for now is to fling it in his face. His soul is as small as his body: he’s a little, mean, suspicious, jealous fellow, and I’m very

glad to have lost him.' She flounced off all on fire, looking six feet high, and got quite out of sight before she began to cry.

Then the truth came out. Mary, absorbed in conjugal bliss, had left it at the hotel by the Lakes. She told Walter.

'Oh, hang it!' said Walter; 'that's unlucky; you will never see it again.'

'Oh yes, I shall,' said Mary; 'they are very honest people at that inn; and I have written about it, and told them to keep it safe, unless they have an opportunity of sending it.'

Walter reflected a moment. 'Take my advice, Mary,' said he: 'let me gallop off this afternoon and get it you.'

'Oh yes, Walter,' said Mary. 'Thank you so much. That will be the best way.'

At this moment loud and angry voices were heard coming round the corner, and Mary uttered a cry of dismay, for her discriminating ear recognised both those voices in a moment. She clutched Walter's shoulder.

‘Oh, Walter, it’s your father and mine quarrelling. How unfortunate that they should have met ! What shall we do ?’

‘Hide in Hope’s office. The French window is open.’

‘Quick, then !’ cried Mary, and darted into the office in a moment. Walter dashed in after her.

When she got safe into cover she began to complain :

‘This comes of concealment—we are always being driven into holes and corners.’

‘I rather like them with you,’ said the unabashed Walter.

It matters little what had passed out of sight between Bartley and Colonel Clifford, for what the young people heard now was quite enough to make what Sir Lucius O’Trigger calls a very pretty quarrel. Bartley, hitherto known to Mary as a very oily speaker, shouted at the top of his voice in arrogant defiance ; ‘You’re not a child, are you ? You are old enough to read papers before you sign them.’

The Colonel shouted in reply : ‘I am old, sir, but I am old in honour. I did not expect that any decent tradesman would slip a clause into a farm-lease conveying the minerals below the surface to a farmer. It was a fraud, sir ; but there’s law for fraud. My lawyer shall be down on you to-morrow. Your chimneys disgorge smoke all over my fields. You shall disgorge your dishonest gains. I’ll have you off my land, sir ; I’ll tear you out of the bowels of the earth. You are a sharper and a knave.’

At this Bartley roared at him louder still, so that both the young people winced as they crouched in the recess of the window. ‘You foul-mouthed slanderer, I’ll indict you for defamation, and give you twelve months in one of her Majesty’s jails.’

‘No, you won’t,’ roared the Colonel ; ‘I know the law. My comments on your character are not written and signed like your knavish lease ; it’s a privileged communication—VILLAIN ! there are no witnesses—SHARPER ! By Jupiter, there are though !’

He had caught sight of a male figure just visible at the side of the window.

‘Who is it? MY SON!’

‘MY DAUGHTER!’ cried Bartley, catching sight of Mary.

‘Come out, sir,’ said the Colonel, no longer loudly, but trembling with emotion.

‘Come here, Mary,’ said Bartley, sternly.

At this moment who should open the back door of the office but William Hope!

‘Walter,’ said the Colonel, with the quiet sternness more formidable than all his bluster, ‘have not I forbidden you to court this man’s daughter?’

Said Bartley to Mary: ‘Haven’t I forbidden you to speak to this ruffian’s son?’

Then, being a cad who had lost his temper, he took the girl by the wrist and gave her a rough pull across him that sent her effectually away from Walter. She sank into the Colonel’s seat, and burst out crying with shame, pain, and fright.

‘Brute!’ said the Colonel. But the thing

was not to end there. Hope strode in amongst them with a pale cheek and a lowering brow as black as thunder ; his first words were, ‘ DO YOU CALL YOURSELF A FATHER ? ’ Not one of them had ever seen Hope like that, and they all stood amazed, and wondered what would come next.

CHAPTER XVI.

REMINISCENCES—THE FALSE ACCUSER—THE
SECRET EXPLODED.

THE secret hung on a thread. Hope, after denouncing Bartley, as we have described, was rushing across to Mary, and what he would have said or done in the first impulse of his wrath, who can tell?

But the quick-witted Bartley took the alarm, and literally collared him. ‘My good friend,’ said he, ‘you don’t know the provocation. It is the affront to her that has made me forget myself. Affronts to myself from the same quarter I have borne with patience. But now this insolent man has forbidden his son to court her, and that to her face; as if we wanted his son or him. Haven’t I forbidden the connection?’

‘We are agreed for once,’ said the Colonel, and carried his son off bodily, sore against his will.

‘Yes,’ shrieked Bartley after him; ‘only I did it like a gentleman, and did not insult the young man to his face for loving my daughter.’

‘Let me hear what Mary says,’ was Hope’s reply.

‘Mr. Hope,’ said Mary, ‘did you ever know papa to be hard on me before? He is vexed because he feels I am lowered. We have both been grossly insulted, and he may well be in a passion. But I am very unhappy.’ And she began to cry again.

‘My poor child,’ said Bartley, coaxingly, ‘talk it all over with Mr. Hope. He may be able to comfort you, and, indeed, to advise me. For what can I do when the man calls me a sharper, a villain, and a knave, before his son and my daughter?’

‘Is it possible?’ said Hope, beginning to relent a little.

‘It is true,’ replied Mary.

Bartley then drew Hope aside, and said, 'See what confidence I place in you. Now show me my trust is not misplaced.' Then he left them together.

Hope came to Mary and said, tenderly : 'What can I say or do to comfort you ?'

Mary shook her head. 'I asked you to mend my prospects ; but you can't do that. They are desperate. You can do nothing for me now but comfort me with your kind voice. And mend my poor wrist—ha ! ha ! ha ! oh ! oh !' (Hysterical.)

'What ?' cried Hope, in sudden alarm ; 'is it hurt ? Is it sprained ?'

Mary recovered her composure. 'Oh no,' said she ; 'only twisted a little. Papa was so rough.'

Hope went into a rage again. 'Perdition !' cried he. 'I'll go and end this once for all.'

'You will do nothing of the kind,' said the quick-witted girl. 'Oh, Mr. Hope, would you break my heart altogether, quarrelling with papa ? Be reasonable. I tell you he couldn't

help it, that old monster insulted him so. It hurts, for all that,' said she, naïvely, and held him out a lovely white wrist with a red mark on it.

Hope inspected it. 'Poor little wrist,' said he. 'I think I can cure it.' Then he went into his office for something to bind it with.

But he had spoken those few words as one speaks to an afflicted child. There was a mellow softness and an undisguised paternity in his tones—and what more natural, the girl being in pain?

But Mary's ear was so acute that these tones carried her out of the present situation, and seemed to stir the depths of memory. She fell into a little reverie, and asked herself had she not heard a voice like that many years ago.

She was puzzling herself a little over this when Hope returned with a long thin band of white Indian cotton, steeped in water, and, taking her hand gently, began to bind her wrist with great lightness and delicacy. And

as he bound it he said, 'There, the pain will soon go.'

Mary looked at him full, and said, slowly, 'I believe it will.' Then, very thoughtfully, 'It did—before.'

These three simple words struck Hope as rather strange.

'It did before?' said he, and stared at her. 'Why, when was that?'

Mary said, in a hopeless sort of way: 'I don't know when, but long before your time.'

'Before my time, Mary? What, are you older than me?' And he smiled sweetly on her.

'One would think not. But let me ask you a question, Mr. Hope?'

'Yes, Mary.'

'Have you lived *two lives*?'

Said Hope, solemnly: 'I have lived through great changes, but only one life.'

'Well, then,' said Mary, 'I have lived two; or more likely it was one life, only some of it in another world—my other world, I mean.'

Hope left off binding her wrist, and said, 'I don't understand you.' But his heart began to pant.

The words that passed between them were now so strange that both their voices sank into solemnity, and had an acute observer listened to them he would have noticed that these two mellow voices had similar beauties, and were pitched exactly in the same key, though there was, of course, an octave between them.

'Understand me? How should you? It is all so strange, so mysterious: I have never told a soul; but I will tell you. You won't laugh at me?'

'Laugh at you? Only fools laugh at what they don't understand. Why, Mary, I hang on every word you say with breathless interest.'

'Dear Mr. Hope! Well, then, I will tell you. Sometimes in the silent night, when the present does not glare at one, the past comes back to me dimly, and I seem to have lived two lives: one long, one short—too short. My long life in a comfortable house, with servants

and carriages and all that. My short life in different places; not comfortable places, but large places; all was free and open, and there was always a kind voice in my ears—like yours; and a tender touch—like yours.’

Hope was restraining himself with difficulty, and here he could not help uttering a faint exclamation.

To cover it he took her wrist again, and, bending his head over it, he said, almost in a whisper, ‘And the face?’

Mary’s eyes turned inward, and she seemed to scan the past.

‘The face?’ said she—‘the face I cannot recall. But one thing I do remember clearly. This is not the first time my wrist—yes—and it was my right wrist too—has been bound up so tenderly. He did it for me in that other world, just as you do in this one.’

Hope now thrilled all over at this most unexpected revelation. But though he glowed with delight and curiosity, he put on a calm voice and manner, and begged her to tell him

everything else she could remember that had happened in that other life.

Finding him so serious, so sympathetic, and so interested, put this remarkable girl on her mettle. She began to think very hard, and show that intense power of attention she had always in reserve for great occasions.

‘Then you must not touch me nor speak to me,’ said she. ‘The past is such a mist.’

He obeyed, and left off binding her wrist ; and now he literally hung upon her words.

Then she took one step away from him ; her bright eyes veiled themselves, and seemed to see nothing external, but looked into the recesses of the brain. Her forehead, her hand, her very body thought, and we must try, though it is almost hopeless, to convey some faint idea of her manner and her words.

‘Let—me—see.’

Then she paused.

‘I remember—WHITE SWANS.’

A pause.

‘Were they swans?’

‘Or ships?’

‘They floated down the river to the sea.’

She paused.

‘And the kind voice beside me said :

“Darling!” Papa never calls me “darling.”’

‘Yes, yes,’ whispered Hope, almost panting.

“Darling, we must go with them to some other land, for we are poor.”’ She paused and thought hard. ‘Poor we must have been; very poor, I can see now that I am rich.’ She paused and thought hard. ‘But all was peace and love. There were two of us, yet we seemed one.’

Then in a moment Mary left the past, her eyes resigned the film of thought, and shone with the lustre of her great heart, and she burst at once into that simple eloquence which no hearer of hers from John Baker to William Hope ever resisted. ‘Ah! sweet memories, treasures of the past, why are you so dim and wavering, and this hard world so clear and glaring it seems cut out of stone? Oh, if I had

a fairy's wand, I'd say: "Vanish fine house and servants—vanish wealth and luxury and strife; and you come back to me, sweet hours of peace—and poverty—and love."'

Her arms were stretched out with a grace and ardour that could embellish even eloquence, when a choking sob struck her ear. She turned her head swiftly, and there was William Hope, his hands working, his face convulsed, and the tears running down his cheeks like the very rain.

It was no wonder. Think of it! The child he adored, yet had parted with to save her from dire poverty, remembered that sad condition to ask for it back again, because of his love that made it sweet to her after all these years of comfort. And of late he had been jealous, and saw, or thought, he had no great place in her heart, and never should have.

Ah, it is a rarity to shed tears of joy! The thing is familiarly spoken of, but the truth is that many pass through this world of tears and never shed one such tear. The few who have shed them can congratulate William Hope for

this blissful moment after all he had done and suffered.

But the sweet girl who so surprised that manly heart, and drew those heavenly tears, had not the key. She was shocked, surprised, distressed. She burst out crying directly from blind womanly sympathy ; and then she took herself to task. ‘ Oh, Mr. Hope ! what have I done ? Ah ! I have touched some chord of memory. Wicked, selfish girl, to distress you with my dreams.’

‘ Distress me !’ cried Hope. ‘ These tears you have drawn from me are pearls of memory and drops of balm to my sore, tried heart. I, too, have lived and struggled in a by-gone world. I had a lovely child ; she made me rich in my poverty, and happy in my homelessness. She left me——’

‘ Poor Mr. Hope !’

‘ Then I went abroad, drudged in foreign mines, came home and saw my child again in you. I need no fairy’s wand to revive the past ; you are my fairy—your sweet words

recall those by-gone scenes ; and wealth, ambition, all I live for now, vanishes into smoke. The years themselves roll back, and all is once more peace—and poverty—and love.'

'Dear Mr. Hope !' said Mary, and put her forehead upon his shoulder.

After a while she said timidly, 'Dear Mr. Hope, now I feel I can trust you with anything.' Then she looked down in charming confusion. 'My reminiscences—they are certainly a great mystery. But I have another secret to confide to you if I am permitted.'

'Is the consent of some other person necessary?'

'Not exactly necessary, Mr. Hope.'

'But advisable.'

Mary nodded her head.

'Then take your time,' said Hope. He took out his watch, and said : 'I want to go to the mine. My right-hand man reports that a ruffian has been caught lighting his pipe in a most dangerous part after due warning. I must stop that game at once, or we shall have a fatal

accident. But I will be back in half an hour. You can rest in my office if you are here first. It is nice and cool.'

Hope hurried away on his errand, and Mary was still looking after him, when she heard a horse's feet, and up came Walter Clifford, escaped from his father. He slipped off his horse directly at sight of Mary, and they came together like steel and magnet.

'Oh, Walter,' said Mary, 'we are not so unfortunate as we were just now. We have a powerful friend. Where are you going in such a hurry?'

'That is a good joke. Why, did you not order me to the Lakes?'

'Oh yes, for Julia's bracelet. I forgot all about that.'

'Very likely; but it is not my business to forget your orders.'

'Dear Walter! But, dearest, things of more importance have happened since then. We have been insulted. Oh, how we have been insulted!'

‘That we have,’ said Walter, sternly.

‘And nobody knows the truth.’

‘Not yet.’

‘And our secret oppresses me—torments me—degrades me.’

‘Pray don’t say that.’

‘Forgive me. I can’t help saying it, I feel it so bitterly. Now, dear, I will walk a little way with you, and tell you what I want you to do this very day ; and you will be a darling, as you always are. and consent.’

Then Mary told how Mr. Hope had just shown her singular affection ; next she reminded him of the high tone Mr. Hope had taken with her father in their hearing. ‘Why,’ said she, ‘there is some mysterious compact about me between papa and him. I don’t think I shall ever have the courage to ask him about that compact, for then I must confess that I listened ; but it is clear we can depend upon Mr. Hope, and trust him. So now, dear, I want you to indulge your little wife, and let me take Mr. Hope into our confidence.’

To Mary's surprise and disappointment, Walter's countenance fell.

'I don't know,' said he, after a pause. 'Unfortunately it's not Mr. Bartley only that's against us.'

'Well, but, dear,' said Mary, 'the more people there are against us, the more we need one powerful friend and champion. Now you know Mr. Hope is a man that everybody loves and respects, even your father.'

Walter just said, gloomily : 'I see objections, for all that ; but do as you please.'

Mary's tender heart and loving nature couldn't accept an unwilling assent. She turned her eyes on Walter a little reproachfully : 'That's the way to make me do what you please.'

'I don't intend it so,' said Walter. 'When a husband and wife love each other as we do, they must give in to each other.'

'That's not what we said at the altar.'

'Oh, the marriage service is rather one-sided. I promised very different things to get

you to marry me, and I mean to stand by them. If you are impatient at all of this secrecy, tell Mr. Hope.'

'I can't now,' said Mary, a little bitterly.

'Why not, since I consent?'

'An unwilling consent is no consent.'

'Mary, you are too tyrannical. How can I downright like a thing I don't like? I yield my will to yours; there's a certain satisfaction in that. I really can say no more.'

'Then say no more,' said Mary, almost severely.

'At all events, give me a kiss at parting.'

Mary gave him that directly, but it was not a warm one.

He galloped away upon his errand, and as she paced slowly back toward Mr. Hope's office she was a good deal put out. What should she say to Mr. Hope now? She could not defy Walter's evident wishes, and make a clean breast of the matter. Then she asked herself what was Walter's objection; she couldn't conceive why he was afraid to trust Mr. Hope. It was a perfect puzzle to her.

Indeed this was a most unfortunate dialogue between her and Walter, for it set her mind speculating and guessing at Walter's mind, and thinking all manner of things just at the moment when an enemy, smooth as the old serpent, was watching for an opportunity to make mischief and poison her mind. Leonard Monckton, who had long been hanging about, waiting to catch her alone, met her returning from Walter Clifford, and took off his hat very respectfully to her, and said :

‘Miss Bartley, I think.’

Mary lifted her eyes, and saw an elderly man with a pale face and dark eyebrows and a cast of countenance quite unlike that of any of her friends. His face repelled her directly, and she said, very coldly :

‘Yes, sir; but I have not the pleasure of knowing you.’

And she quietly passed on.

Monckton affected not to see that she was declining to communicate with him. He walked on quietly and said :

‘And I have not seen you since you were a

child, but I had the honour of knowing your mother.'

'You knew my mother, sir?'

'Knew her and respected her.'

'What was she like, sir?'

'She was tall and rather dark, not like you.'

'So I have heard,' said Mary. 'Well, sir,' said she, for his voice was ingratiating, and had modified the effect of his criminal countenance, 'as you knew my mother, you are welcome to me.'

The artist in deceit gave a little sigh, and said: 'That's more than I dare hope. For I am here upon a most unpleasant commission; but for my respect for your mother I would not have undertaken it, for really my acquaintance with the other lady is but slight.'

Mary looked a little surprised at this rigmale, and said, 'But this commission, what is it?'

'Miss Bartley,' said he, solemnly, yet

gravely, 'I have been requested to warn you against a gentleman who is deceiving you.'

'Who is that?' said Mary, on her guard, directly.

'It is a Mr. Walter Clifford.'

'Walter Clifford!' said Mary. 'You are a slanderer; he is incapable of deceit.'

The rogue pretended to brighten up.

'Well, I hope so,' said he, 'and I told the lady as much; he comes from a most honourable stock. So then he has *told* you about Lucy Monckton?'

'Lucy Monckton!' cried Mary. 'No; who is she?'

'Miss Bartley,' said the villain, very gravely and solemnly, 'she is his wife.'

'His wife, sir?' cried Mary, contemptuously — 'his wife? You must be mad. I'll hear no more against him behind his back.' Then, threatening her tormentor: 'He will be home again this evening; he has only ridden to the Lake Hotel; you shall repeat this to his face, if you dare.'

‘It will be my painful duty,’ said the serpent, meekly.

‘His wife?’ said Mary, scornfully, but her lips trembled.

‘His wife,’ replied Monckton, calmly; ‘a respectable woman whom, it seems, he has deserted these fourteen years. My acquaintance with her is slight, but she is in a good position, and, indeed, wealthy, and has never troubled him. However, she heard somehow he was courting you, and, as I often visit Derby upon business, she requested me to come over here and warn you in time.’

‘And do you think,’ said Mary, scornfully, ‘I shall believe this from a stranger?’

‘Hardly,’ said Monckton, with every appearance of candour. ‘Mrs. Walter Clifford directed me to show you his marriage-certificate and hers.’

‘The marriage-certificate!’ cried Mary, turning pale.

‘Yes,’ said Monckton; ‘they were married at the Registry Office on the 11th June, 1861,’

and he put his hand in his breast-pocket to search for the certificate. He took this opportunity to say: 'You must not fancy that there is any jealousy or ill-feeling after fourteen years' desertion, but she felt it her duty as a woman——'

'The certificate!' said Mary—'the certificate!'

He showed her the certificate; she read the fatal words, 'Walter Clifford.' The rest swam before her eyes, and to her the world seemed at an end. She heard, as in a dream, the smooth voice of the false accuser, saying, with a world of fictitious sympathy: 'I wish I had never undertaken this business. Mrs. Walter Clifford doesn't want to distress you; she only felt it her duty to save you. Don't give way. There is no great harm done, unless you were to be deluded into marrying him.'

'And what then?' inquired Mary, trembling.

Monckton appeared to be agitated at this question.

‘Oh, don’t speak of it,’ said he. ‘You would be ruined for life, and he would get seven years’ penal servitude; and that is a sentence few gentlemen survive in the present day when prisons are slaughter-houses. There, I have discharged the most disagreeable office I ever undertook in my life; but at all events you are warned in time.’

Then he bowed most respectfully to her, and retired, exhaling his pent-up venom in a diabolical grin.

She, poor victim, stood there stupefied, pierced with a poisoned arrow, and almost in a state of collapse; then she lifted her hands and eyes for help, and saw Hope’s study in front of her. Everything swam confusedly before her; she did not know for certain whether he was there or not; she cried to that true friend for help.

‘Mr. Hope—I am lost—I am in the deep waters of despair—save me *once more*, save me!’

Thus speaking she tottered into the office, and sank all limp and powerless into a chair, unable

to move or speak, but still not insensible, and soon her brow sank upon the table, and her hands spread themselves feebly out before her.

It was all villainous spite on Monckton's part. He did not for a moment suppose that his lie could long outlive Walter Clifford's return; but he was getting desperate, and longing to stab them all. Unfortunately fate befriended the villain's malice, and the husband and wife did not meet again till that diabolical poison had done its work.

Monckton retired, put off his old man's disguise behind the fir-trees, and went toward another of his hiding-places, an enormous oak-tree which stood in the hedge of Hope's cottage garden. The subtle villain had made this hollow tree an observatory, and a sort of sally-port, whence he could play the fiend.

The people at the hotel were, as Mary told Julia Clifford, very honest people.

They showed Percy Fitzroy's bracelet to one

or two persons, and found it was of great value. This made them uneasy, lest something should happen to it under their charge; so the woman sent her husband to the neighbourhood of Clifford Hall to try and find out if there was a lady of that name who had left it. The husband was a simple fellow, very unfit to discharge so delicate a commission. He went at first, as a matter of course, to the public-house; they directed him to the Hall, but he missed it, and encountered a gentleman, whose quick eye fell upon the bracelet, for the foolish man had shown it to so many people that now he was carrying it in his hand, and it blazed in the meridian sun. This gentleman said, 'What have you got there?'

'Well, sir,' said the man, 'it was left at our hotel by a young couple from these parts. Handsome couple they were, sir, and spending their honeymoon.'

'Let me see it,' said Mr. Bartley, for he was the gentleman. He had come back in some anxiety to see whether Hope had pacified

Mary, or whether he must exert himself to make matters smooth with her again. Whilst he was examining the bracelet, who should appear but Percy Fitzroy, the owner. Not that he came after the bracelet; on the contrary, that impetuous young gentleman had discovered during the last two hours that he valued Miss Clifford's love a great deal more than all the bracelets in the world; for all that, he was delighted at the unexpected sight of his property.

‘Why, that’s mine,’ said he. ‘It’s an heirloom. I lent it to Miss Julia Clifford, and when I asked her for it to-day she could not produce it.’

‘Oh! oh!’ said Mr. Bartley. ‘What, do the ladies of the house of Clifford go in for clandestine marriages?’

‘Certainly not, sir,’ said Fitzroy. ‘Don’t you know the difference between a wedding ring and a bracelet?’ Then he turned to the man, ‘Here’s a sovereign for your trouble, my man. Now give me my bracelet.’

To his surprise the hotel-keeper put it behind his back instead of giving it to him.

‘Nay,’ said he, shaking his head knowingly, ‘you are not the gentleman that spent the honeymoon with the lady as owns it. My mistress said I was not to give it into no hands but hers.’

This staggered Percy dreadfully, and he looked from one to another to assist him in solving the mystery.

Bartley came to the assistance of his understanding, but with no regard to the feelings of his heart. ‘It’s clear enough what it means, sir ; your sweetheart is playing you false.’

That went through the true lover’s heart like a knife, and poor little Percy leaned in despair against Hope’s workshop window transfixed by the poisoned arrow of jealousy.

At this moment the voice of Colonel Clifford was heard, loud and ringing as usual. Julia Clifford had decoyed him there in hopes of falling in with Percy and making it up ; and to

deceive the good Colonel as to her intentions she had been running him down all the way; so the Colonel was heard to say, in a voice for all the village to hear, 'Jealous is he, and suspicious? Then you take my advice and give him up at once. You will easily find a better man and a bigger.' After delivering this, like the word of command upon parade, the Colonel was crossing the turf, a yard or two higher up than Hope's workshop, when the spirit of revenge moved Bartley to retort upon his insulter :

'Hi, Colonel Clifford!'

The Colonel instantly halted, and marched down with Julia on his arm, like a game-cock when another rooster crows defiance.

'And what can you have to say to me, sir?' was his haughty inquiry.

'To take you down a peg. You rode the high horse pretty hard to-day. The spotless honour of the Cliffords, eh?'

Then, of course, it was fixed bayonets and no quarter.

‘Have the Cliffords ever dabbled in trade or trickery? Coal merchants, coal heavers, and coal whippers may defile our fields with coal dust and smoke, but they cannot defile our honour.’

‘The men are brave as lions, and the women as chaste as snow?’ sneered Bartley.

‘I don’t know about lions and snow. I have often seen a lion turn tail, and the snow is black slush wherever you are. But the Cliffords, being gentlemen, are brave, and, being ladies, are chaste.’

‘Oh, indeed!’ hissed Bartley. ‘Then how comes it that your niece there—whose name is *Miss Clifford*, I believe—spent what this good man calls a honeymoon, with a young gentleman, at this good man’s inn?’

Here the good man in question made a faint endeavour to interpose, but the gentlefolks by their impetuosity completely suppressed him.

‘It’s a falsehood!’ cried Julia haughtily.

‘You scurrilous cad!’ roared the Colonel,

and shook his staff at him, and seemed on the point of charging him.

But Bartley was not to be put down this time. He snatched the bracelet from the man, and held it up in triumph.

‘And left this bracelet there to prove it was no falsehood.’

Then Julia got frightened at the evidence and the terrible nature of the accusation. ‘Oh!’ cried she, in great distress, ‘can any one here believe that I am a creature so lost? I have not seen the bracelet these two months. I lent it—to—ah, here she is! Mary, save me from shame; you know I am innocent.’

Mary, who was standing at the window in Hope’s study, came slowly forward, pale as death with her own trouble, to do an act of womanly justice. ‘Miss Clifford,’ said she, languidly, as one to whom all human events were comparatively indifferent—‘Miss Clifford lent the bracelet to me, and I left it at that man’s inn.’ This she said right in the middle of them all.

The hotel-keeper took the bracelet from the unresisting hand of Bartley, touched his hat, and gave it to her.

‘There, mistress,’ said he. ‘I could have told them you was the lady, but they would not let a poor fellow get a word in edgeways.’ He retired with an obeisance.

Mary handed the bracelet to Julia, and then remained passive.

A dead silence fell upon them all, and a sort of horror crept over Mary Bartley at what must follow ; but, come what might, no power should induce her to say the word that should send Walter Clifford to jail for seven years.

Bartley came to her ; she trembled and her hands worked.

‘What are you saying, you fool?’ he whispered. ‘The lady that left the bracelet was there with a gentleman.’

Mary winced.

Then Bartley said, sternly, ‘Who was your companion?’

‘I must not say.’

‘You will say one thing,’ said Bartley, ‘or I shall have no mercy on you. Are you secretly married?’

Then a single word flashed across Mary’s almost distracted mind—SELF-SACRIFICE. She held her tongue.

‘Can’t you speak? Are you a wife?’ He now began to speak so loud in his anger that everybody heard it.

Mary crouched a little and worked her hands convulsively under the torture, but she answered with such a doggedness that evidently she would have let herself be cut to pieces sooner than say more.

‘I—don’t—know.’

‘You don’t know?’ roared Bartley.

Mary paused, and then, with iron doggedness, ‘I—don’t—know.’

This apparent insult to his common-sense drove Bartley almost mad. ‘You have given these cursed Cliffords a triumph over me,’ he cried. ‘You have brought shame to my door; but it shall never pass the threshold.’ Here

the Colonel uttered a contemptuous snort. This drove Bartley wild altogether ; he rushed at the Colonel, and shook his fist in his face : ‘ You stand there sneering at my humiliation ; now see the example I can make.’ Then he was down upon Mary in a moment, and literally yelled at her in his fury. ‘ Go to your paramour, girl ; go where you will. You never enter my door again.’ And he turned his back furiously upon her.

This terrible denunciation overpowered poor Mary’s resolution ; she clung to him in terror. ‘ Oh, mercy, mercy, papa ! I’ll explain to *you*, have pity on your child !’

Bartley flung her so roughly from him that she nearly fell. ‘ You are my child no more.’

But at that moment in strode William Hope, looking seven feet high, and his eyes blazing. ‘ Liar and hypocrite,’ he roared, ‘ *she never was your child !* Then, changing to a tone of exquisite love, and stretching out both his hands to Mary, ‘ SHE IS MINE !’

Mary, being now between the two men,

turned swiftly first to one, then to the other, and with woman's infallible eye knew her own flesh and blood in that half-moment. She uttered a cry of love and rapture that went through every heart that heard it; and she flung herself in a moment upon her father's bosom.

He whirled her round like a feather on to his right arm, then faced both her enemies, Clifford and Bartley, with haughty defiance, head thrown back, and eyes that flashed black lightning in defence of his child.

CHAPTER XVII.

LOVERS' QUARRELS.

It was a living picture : the father protecting his child like an eagle ; Bartley cooled in a moment, and hanging his head apart, gloomy and alarmed at the mad blunder rage had betrayed him into ; Colonel Clifford amazed and puzzled, and beginning to see the consequences of all this ; Julia clasping her hands in rapture and thrilling interest at so romantic an incident ; Fitzroy beaming with delight at his sweetheart being cleared ; and, to complete the picture, the villainous face of Leonard Monckton, disguised as an old man, showed itself for a moment sinister and gloomy ; for now all hope of pecuniary advantage to him was gone, and nothing but revenge was on the

cards, and he could not see his way clear to that.

But Hope was no posture-maker ; he turned the next moment and said a word or two to all present :

‘Yes, this is Grace Hope, my daughter. We were very poor, and her life was in danger ; I saw nothing else but that ; my love was stronger than my conscience ; I gave her to that man upon a condition which he has now broken. He saved her life and was kind to her. I thanked him ; I thank him still, and I did my best to repay him. But now he has trusted to appearances, and not to her ; he has belied and outraged her publicly. But I am as proud of her as ever, and don’t believe appearances against her character and her angel face and——’

‘No more do I,’ cried Julia Clifford eagerly. ‘I know her. She’s purity itself, and a better woman than I shall ever be.’

‘Thank you, Miss Clifford,’ said Hope, in a broken voice ; ‘God bless you. Come, Grace,

and share my humble home. At all events, it will shelter you from insult.'

And so the pair went lovingly away, Grace clinging to her father, comforted for the moment, but unable to speak, and entered Hope's little cottage. It was but a stone's-throw from where they stood.

This broke up the party.

'And my house is yours,' said Colonel Clifford to Julia. 'I did not believe appearances against a Clifford.' With these words he took two steps toward his niece and held out his arm. She moved towards him. Percy came forward radiant to congratulate her. She drew up with a look of furious scorn that made him recoil, and she marched proudly away with her uncle. He bestowed one parting glance of contempt upon the discomfited Bartley, and marched his niece proudly off, more determined than ever that she should be his daughter. But for once he was wise enough not to press that topic: he let her indignation work alone. Moreover, though he was a little wrong-headed

and not a little pig-headed, he was a noble-minded man, and nothing noble passed him unobserved or unappreciated.

‘*That* Bartley’s daughter!’ said he to Julia. ‘Ay, when roses spring from dunghills, and eagles are born of sparrow-hawks. Brave girl!—brave girl!’

‘Oh, uncle,’ said Julia, ‘I am so glad you appreciate her!’

‘Appreciate her!’ said the Colonel; ‘what should I be worth if I did not? Why, these are the women that win Waterloo in the persons of their sons. That girl could never breed a coward nor a cheat.’ Then his incisive voice mellowed suddenly. ‘Poor young thing,’ said he, with manly emotion, ‘I saw her come out of that room pale as death to do another woman justice. She’s no fool, though that ruffian called her one. She knew what she was doing, yet for all her woman’s heart she faced disgrace as unflinchingly as if it was only death. It was a great action, a noble action, a just action, and a manly action, but done like a

very woman. Where the two sexes meet like that in one brave deed it's grand. I declare, it warms an old soldier's heart, and makes him thank God there are a few creatures in the world that do humanity honour.'

As the Colonel was a man that stuck to a topic when he got upon it, this was the main of his talk all the way to Clifford Hall. He even remarked to his niece that, so far as his observations of the sex extended, great love of justice was not the leading feature of the female mind; other virtues, he ventured to think, were more prominent.

'So everybody says,' was Julia's admission.

'Everybody is right for once,' said the Colonel.

They entered the house together, and Miss Clifford went up to her room; there she put on a new bonnet and a lovely shawl, recently imported from Paris. Who could this be for? She sauntered upon the lawn till she found herself somehow near the outward boundary, where there was a gate leading into the Park.

As she walked to and fro by this gate she observed, out of the tail of her eye, of course, the figure of a devoted lover creeping toward her. Whether this took her by surprise, or whether the lovely creature was playing the part of a beautiful striped spider waiting for her fly, the reader must judge for himself.

Percy came to the gate; she walked past him twice, coming and going with her eyes fixed upon vacancy. She passed him a third time. He murmured in a pleading voice :

‘ Julia ! ’

She neither saw nor heard, so attractive had the distant horizon become.

Percy opened the gate and came inside, and stood before her the next time she passed. She started with *surprise*.

‘ What do you want here ? ’ said she.

‘ To speak to you.’

‘ How dare you speak to me after your vile suspicions ? ’

‘ Well, but, Julia——’

‘ How dare you call me Julia ? ’

‘ Well, Miss Clifford, won’t you even hear me ? ’

‘ Not a word. It’s through you poor dear Mary and I have both been insulted by that wretch of a father of hers.’

‘ Which father ? ’

‘ I said wretch. To whom does that term apply except to Mr. Bartley, and ’ (with sudden vigour) ‘ to you.’

‘ Then you think I’m as bad as old Bartley,’ said Percy, firing up.

‘ No, I don’t.’

‘ Ah,’ said Percy, glad to find there was a limit.

But Julia explained : ‘ I think you are a great deal worse. You pretend to love me, and yet without the slightest reason you doubt me.’

‘ What did I doubt ? ’ I thought you had parted with my bracelet to another person, and so you had. I never doubted your honour.’

‘ Oh yes, you did ; I saw your face.’

‘ I am not r—r—responsible for my face.’

‘Yes, you are ; you had no business to look broken-hearted, and miserable, and distrustful, and abominable. It was your business, face and all, to distrust appearances, and not me.’

‘Ap—pear—ances were so strong that not to look m—miserable would have been to seem indifferent ; there is no love where there is no jealousy.’

‘Oh,’ said Julia, ‘he has let that out at last, after denying it a hundred times. Now I say there is no true love without respect and confidence, and this doesn’t exist where there is jealousy, and all about a trumpery bracelet.’

‘Anything but tr—ump—ump—umpery ; it came down from my ancestors.’

‘You never had any ; your behaviour shows that.’

‘I tell you it is an heirloom. It was given to my mother by——’

‘Oh, we know all about that,’ said Julia. ‘“This bracelet did an Egyptian to my mother give.” But you are not going to play Othello with me.’

‘I shouldn’t have a very gentle Desdemona.’

‘No, you wouldn’t, candidly. No man shall ever bully and insult me, and then wake me out of my first sleep to smother me because my maid has lost one of his handkerchiefs at the wash.’

Percy burst out laughing at this turn, and tried to inveigle her into good humour.

‘Say no more about it,’ said he, ‘and I’ll forgive you.’

‘Forgive me, you little wretch!’ cried Julia. ‘Why, haven’t you the sense to see that it is serious this time, and my patience is exhausted, and that our engagement is broken off, and I never mean to see you again—except when you come to my wedding?’

‘Your wedding!’ cried Percy, turning pale. ‘With whom?’

‘That’s my business; you leave that to me, sir. Hold out your hand—both hands; here is the ancestral bracelet—it shall pinch me no longer, neither my wrist nor my heart;

here's the brooch you gave me—I won't be pinned to it any longer, nor to you either; and there is your bunch of charms; and there is your bundle of love-letters—stupid ones they are;' and she crammed all the aforesaid treasures into his hands one after the other. So this was what she went to her room for.

Percy looked down on his handful ruefully. 'My very letters! There was no jealousy in them; they were full of earnest love.'

'Fuller of bad spelling,' said the relentless girl. Then she went into details: 'You spell "abominable" with two *m*'s—and that's abominable; you spell "ridiculous" with a *k*—and that's ridicklous. So after this don't you presume to speak to me, for I shall never speak to you again.'

'Very well, then,' said Percy. 'I, too, will be silent for ever.'

'Oh, I daresay,' said Julia; 'a chatterbox like you.'

'Even chatterboxes are silent in the grave,'

suggested Percy ; ‘and if we are to part like this for ever to-day, to-morrow I shall be no more.’

‘Well, you could not be much less,’ said Julia, but with a certain shamefaced change of tone that perhaps, if Percy had been more experienced, might have given him a ray of hope.

‘Well,’ said he, ‘I know one lady that would not treat these presents with quite so much contempt.’

‘Oh, I have seen her,’ said Julia spitefully. ‘She has been setting her cap at you for some time ; it’s Miss Susan Beckley—a fine conquest !—great, fat, red-haired thing.’

‘Auburn.’

‘Yes, all-burn, scarlet, carrots, *flamme d’enfer*. Well, go and give her my leavings, yourself and your ancestral—paste.’

‘Well,’ said Percy gloomily, ‘I might do worse. You never really loved me ; you were always like an enemy looking out for faults. You kept postponing our union for something

to happen to break it off. But I won't be any woman's slave; I'll use one to drive out the other. None of you shall trample on me.' Then he burst forth into singing. Nobody stammers when he sings.

Shall I, wasting in despair,
Sigh because a woman's fair?
Shall my cheeks grow pale with care
Because another's rosy are?
If she be not kind to me,
What care I how fair she be?

This resolute little gentleman passed through the gate as he concluded the verse, waved his hand jauntily by way of everlasting adieu, and went off whistling the refrain with great spirit, and both hands in his pockets.

'You impudent——' cried Julia, almost choking; then, authoritatively, 'Percy—Mr. Fitzroy;' then, coaxingly, 'Percy *dear*.'

Percy heard, and congratulated himself upon his spirit. 'That's the way to treat them,' said he to himself.

'Well?' said he, with an air of indifference,

and going slowly back to the gate. ‘What is it now?’ said he, a little arrogantly.

She soon let him know. Directly he was quite within reach she gave him a slap in the face that sounded like one plank falling upon another, and marched off with an air of royal dignity, as if she had done the most graceful and lady-like thing in all the world.

How happy are those choice spirits who can always preserve their dignity!

Percy retired red as fire, and one of his cheeks retained that high colour for the rest of the day.

CHAPTER XVIII.

APOLOGIES.

WE must now describe the place to which Hope conducted his daughter, and please do not skip our little description. It is true that some of our gifted contemporaries paint Italian scenery at prodigious length *à propos de bottes*, and others show in many pages that the rocks and the sea are picturesque objects, even when irrelevant. True that others gild the evening clouds and the western horizon merely to please the horizon and the clouds. But we hold with Pope that

The proper study of mankind is man,

and that authors' pictures are bores, except as narrow frames to big incidents. The true model, we think, for a writer is found in the opening lines of 'Marmion,' where the castle at

eventide, its yellow lustre, its drooping banner, its mailclad warders reflecting the western blaze, the tramp of the sentinel, and his low-hummed song, are flung on paper with the broad and telling touch of Rubens, not from an irrelevant admiration of old castles and the setting sun, but because the human figures of the story are riding up to that sun-gilt castle to make it a scene of great words and deeds.

Even so, though on a much humbler scale, we describe Hope's cottage and garden merely because it was for a moment or two the scene of a remarkable incident never yet presented in history or fiction.

This cottage, then, was in reality something between a villa and a cottage ; it resembled a villa in this, that the rooms were lofty, and the windows were casements glazed with plate glass and very large. Walter Clifford had built it for a curate, who proved a bird of passage, and the said Walter had a horror of low rooms, for he said, 'I always feel as if the ceiling was going to flatten me to the floor.'

Owing to this the bed-room windows, which looked westward on the garden, were a great height from the ground, and the building had a Gothic character.

Still there was much to justify the term cottage. The door, which looked southward on the road, was at the side of the building, and opened, not into a hall, but into the one large sitting-room, which was thirty feet long and twenty-five feet broad, and instead of a plaster ceiling there were massive joists, which Hope had gilded and painted till they were a sight to behold. Another cottage feature : the walls were literally clothed with verdure and colours ; in front, huge creeping geraniums, jasmine, and Virginia creepers hid the brick-work ; and the western walls, to use the words of a greater painter than ourselves, were

Quite overcanopied with lush woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine.

In the next place, the building stood in a genuine cottage-garden. It was close to the road. The southern boundary was plain oak

paling, made of upright pieces which Hope had varnished so that the colour was now a fine amber ; the rest of the boundary was a quickset hedge, in the western division of which stood an enormous oak-tree, hollow at the back. And the garden was fair with humble flowers—pinks, sweet-williams, crimson nasturtiums, double daisies, lilies, and tulips ; but flower beds shared the garden with friendly cabbages, potatoes, onions, carrots, and asparagus.

To this humble but pleasant abode Hope conducted his daughter, and insisted upon her lying down on the sofa in the sitting-room. Then he ordered the woman who kept the house for him to prepare the spare bedroom, which looked into the garden, and to cut some of the sweet-smelling flowers. He himself had much to say to his daughter, and, above all, to demand her explanation of the awkward circumstances that had been just revealed. But she had received a great shock, and, like most manly men, he had a great consideration for the weakness of women, and his paternal heart

said, ‘ Let her have an hour or two of absolute repose before I subject her to any trial whatever.’ So he opened the window to give her air, enjoining her most strictly not to move, but even to go to sleep if she could ; and then he put on his shooting coat, with large inside pockets, to go and buy her a little wine—a thing he never touched himself—and what other humble delicacies the village afforded. He walked briskly away from his door without the least idea that all his movements were watched from a hiding-place upon his own premises, no other than the great oak-tree, hollow and open at the back, in which Leonard Monckton had bored two peep-holes, and was now ensconced there watching him.

Hope had not gone many yards from his own door when he was confronted by one of those ruffians who, by their way of putting it, are the eternal butt of iniquitous people and iniquitous things, namely, honest men, curse them ! and the law, confound it ! This was no other than that Ben Burnley, who, being

a miner, had stuck half-way between Devonshire and Durham, and had been some months in Bartley's mine. He opened on Hope in a loud voice, and dialect, which we despair of conveying with absolute accuracy.

‘Mr. Hope, sir, they won’t let me go down t’ mine.’

‘No ; you’re discharged.’

‘Who by?’

‘By me.’

‘What for?’

‘For smoking in the mine, in spite of three warnings.’

‘Me smoking in t’ mine ! Who telt you yon lie?’

‘You were seen to pick the lock of your Davy-lamp, and that put the mine in danger. Then you were seen to light your pipe at the bare light, and that put it in worse peril.’

‘That’s a lie. What mak’s yer believe my skin’s nowt to me? It’s all one as it is to them liars that would rob me of my bread out of clean spite.’

‘It’s the truth, and proved by four honest witnesses. There are a hundred and fifty men and twenty ponies in that mine, and their lives must not be sacrificed by one two-legged brute that won’t hear reason. You are discharged and paid; so be good enough to quit the premises and find work elsewhere; and Lord help your employer, whoever he is!’

Hope would waste no more time over this fellow. He turned his back, and went off briskly on his more important errand.

Burnley shook his fist at him, and discharged a volley of horrible curses after him. Whilst he was thus raging after the man that had done his duty he heard a satirical chuckle. He turned his head, and, behold! there was the sneering face of his fellow jail-bird Monckton. Burnley started.

‘Yes, mate,’ said Monckton, ‘it is me. And what sort of a pal are you, that couldn’t send me a word to Portland that you had dropped on to this rascal Hope? You knew

I was after him. You might have saved me the trouble, you selfish brute.'

Burnley submitted at once to the ascendancy of Monckton ; he hung his head, and muttered. 'I am no scholard to write to folk.'

'You grudged a joey to a bloke to write for you. Now I suppose you expect me to be a good pal to you again, all the same?'

'Why not?' said Burnley. 'He is poison to you as well as to me. He gave you fourteen years' penal : you told me so at Portland ; let's be revenged on him.'

'What else do you think I am here for, you fool? But empty revenge, that's child's play. The question is, can you do what you are told?'

'Ay, if I see a chance of revenge. Why, I always did what you told me.'

'Very well, then ; there's nothing ripe yet.'

'Yer don't mean I am to wait a year for my revenge.'

‘You will have to wait an opportunity. Revenge is like other luxuries, there’s a time for it. Do you think I am such a fool as to go in for blindfold revenge, and get lagged or stretched? Not for Joseph, nor for you either, Benjamin. I’ll tell you what, though, I think this will be a busy day; it must be a busy day. That old fox Bartley has found out his blunder before now, and he’ll try something on; then the Cliffords they won’t go to sleep on it.’

‘I don’t know what yer talking about,’ says Burnley.

‘Remain in your ignorance, Ben. The best instrument is a blind instrument; you shall have your revenge soon or late.’

‘Let it be soon, then.’

‘In the meantime,’ said Monckton, ‘have you got any money?’

‘Got my wages.’

‘That will do for you to-day. Go to the public-house and get half-drunk.’

‘Half-drunk?’

‘Half-drunk! Don’t I speak plain?’

‘Miners,’ said Burnley candidly, ‘never get half-drunk in t’ county Durham. They are that the best part of their time.’

‘Then you get half-drunk, neither more nor less, or I’ll discharge you as Hope has done, and that will be the worst discharge of the two for you. When you are half-drunk come here directly, and hang about this place. No; you had better be under that tree in the middle of the field there, and pretend to be sleeping off your liquor. Come, mizzle!’

When he had packed off Burnley, he got back into his hiding-place, and only just in time, for Hope came back again upon the wings of love, and Grace, whose elastic nature had revived, saw him coming, and came out to meet him. Hope scolded her gently: why had she got off the sofa when repose was so necessary for her?

‘You are mistaken, dear father,’ said she. ‘I am wonderfully strong and healthy; I never fainted away in my life, and my mind will not

let me rest at present—I have been longing so for my father.’

‘Ah, precious word!’ murmured Hope. ‘Keep saying that word to me, darling. Oh, the years that I have pined for it!’

‘Dear father, we will make up for all those years. Oh, papa, let us not part again, never, never, not even for a day.’

‘My child, we never will. What am I saying? I shall have to give you back to one who has a stronger claim than I—to your husband.’

‘My husband?’ said Mary, turning pale.

‘Yes,’ said Hope; ‘for you know you have a husband. Oh, I heard a few words there before I interfered; but it’s not to me you’ll say “*I don’t know.*” That was good enough for Bartley and a lot of strangers. Come, Grace dear, take my arm; have no concealments from me. Trust to a father’s infinite love, even if you have been imprudent or betrayed; but that’s a thing I shall never believe except from your lips. Take a turn with me my child, since you cannot lie down and rest; a little air, and

gentle movement on your father's arm, and close to your father's heart, will be the next best thing for you.' Then they walked to and fro like lovers.

'Why, Grace, my child,' said he, 'of course I understand it all. No doubt you promised to keep your marriage secret, or had some powerful reason for withholding it from strangers; and, indeed, why should you reveal such a secret to insolence or to mere curiosity? But you will tell the truth to me, your father and your best friend; you will tell me you are a wife.'

'Father,' said Mary trembling, and her eyes roved as if she was looking out for the means of flight.

Hope saw this look, and it made him sick at heart, for he had lived too long, and observed too keenly, not to know that innocence and purity are dangers, and are more often protected by the safeguards of society than by themselves.

'Oh, my child,' said he, 'anything is better than this suspense? Why do you not answer

me? Why do you torture me? Are you Walter Clifford's wife?'

Mary began to pant and sob. 'Oh, papa, have patience with me. You do not know the danger. Wait till he comes back. I dare not; I cannot.'

'Then, by Heaven, he shall!'

He dropped her arm, and his countenance became terrible. She clung to him directly.

'No, no; wait till I have seen him. He will be back this very evening. Do not judge hastily; and oh, papa, as you love your child, do not act rashly.'

'I shall act firmly,' was Hope's firm reply. 'You have come from a sham father to a real one, and you will be protected as well as loved. This lover has forbidden you to confide in your father (he did not know that I was your father, but that makes no difference); it looks very ugly, and if he has wronged you he shall do you justice, or I will have his life.'

'Oh, papa,' screamed Mary, 'his life? Why, mine is bound up in it.'

‘I fear so,’ said Hope. ‘But what’s our life to us without our honour, especially to a woman? He is the true Cain that destroys a pure virgin.’

Then he put both his hands on her shoulder, and said, ‘Look at me, Grace.’ She looked at him full with eyes as brave as a lion’s and as gentle as a gazelle’s.

In a moment his senses enlightened him beyond the power of circumstances to deceive.

‘It’s a lie,’ said he; ‘men are always lying and circumstances deceiving; there is no blush of shame upon these cheeks, no sin nor frailty in these pure eyes. You are his wife.’

‘I am!’ cried Grace, unable to resist any longer.

‘Thank God!’ cried Hope, and father and daughter were locked that moment in a tender embrace.

‘Yes, papa, you shall know all, and then I shall have to fall on my knees and ask you not to punish one I love—for—a fault committed years ago. You will have pity on us both.

Walter and I were married at the altar, and I am his wife in the eyes of Heaven. But, oh, papa, I fear I am not his lawful wife.'

'Not his lawful wife, child! Why, what nonsense!'

'I would to Heaven it was; but this morning I learned for the first time that he had been married before. Oh, it was years ago; but she is alive.'

'Impossible! He could not be so base.'

'Papa,' said Mary, very gravely, 'I have seen the certificate.'

'The certificate!' said Hope, in dismay. 'What certificate?'

'Of the Registry Office. It was shown me by a gentleman she sent expressly to warn me; she had no idea that Walter and I were married, but she had heard somehow of our courtship. I try to thank her, and I tried, and always will, to save him from a prison and his family from disgrace.'

'And sacrifice yourself?' cried Hope, in agony.

‘I love him,’ said Mary, ‘and you must spare him.’

‘I will have justice for my child.’

Grace was in such terror lest her father should punish Walter, that she begged him to consider whether in sacrificing herself she really had not been unintentionally wise. What could she gain by publishing that she had married another woman’s husband? ‘I have lost my husband,’ said she, ‘but I have found my father. Oh, take me away and let me rest my broken heart upon yours, far from all who know me. Every wound seems to be cured in this world, and if time won’t cure this my wound, even with my father’s help, the grave *will*.’

‘Oh, misery!’ cried Hope; ‘do I hear such words as these from my child just entering upon life and all its joys?’

‘Hush, papa,’ said Grace; ‘there is that man.’

That man was Mr. Bartley. He looked very much distressed, and proceeded at once to express his penitence.

CHAPTER XIX.

A WOMAN OUTWITS TWO MEN.

‘OH, Mary, what can I say ! I was simply mad—stung into a fury by that foul-mouthed ruffian. Mary, I am deeply sorry, and thoroughly ashamed of my violence and my cruelty, and I implore you to think of the very many happy years we have spent together without an angry word—not that you ever deserved one. Let us silence all comments ; return to me as the head of my house and the heiress of my fortune ; you will bind Mr. Hope to me still more strongly ; he shall be my partner, and he will not be so selfish as to ruin your future.’

‘Ay,’ said Hope, ‘that’s the same specious argument you tempted me with fifteen years ago. But she was a helpless child then ; she is a woman now, and can decide for herself. As

for me, I will not be your partner. I have a small royalty on your coal, and that is enough for me; but Grace shall do as she pleases. My child, will you go to the brilliant future that his wealth can secure you, or share my modest independence, which will need all my love to brighten it? Think before you answer; your own future life depends upon yourself.'

With this he turned his back and walked for some distance very stoutly, then leaned upon the palings with his back toward Grace; but even a back can speak, and the young lady looked at him and her eyes filled; then she turned them towards Bartley, and those clear eyes dried as if the fire in the heart had scorched them.

'In the first place, sir,' said she, with a cold and cutting voice, very unusual to her, 'my name is not Mary, it is Grace; and be assured of this, if there was not another roof in all the world to shelter me, if I was helpless, friendless, and fatherless, I would die in the nearest ditch rather than set my foot in the house from

which I was thrust out with shame and insult such as no lady ever yet forgave. But, thank Heaven, I am not at your mercy at all. He to whom nature has drawn me all these years is my father— Oh, papa, come to me ; is it for *you* to stand aloof? It is into your hands, with all the trust and love you have earned so well from your poor Grace, I give my love, my veneration, and my heart and soul for ever.' Then she flung herself panting on his bosom, and he cried over her. The next moment he led her to the house, where he made her promise to repose now after this fresh trial ; and, indeed, he would have followed her, but Bartley implored him so piteously for the sake of old times not to refuse him one word more, that he relented so far as to come out to him, though he felt it was a waste of time.

He said, ' Mr. Bartley, it's no use ; nothing can undo this morning's work ; our paths lie apart. From something Walter Clifford let fall one day, I suspect he is the person you robbed, and induced me to rob, of a large fortune.'

‘ Well, what is he to you ? Have pity upon me ; be silent, and name your own price.’

‘ Wrong Walter Clifford with my eyes open ? He is the last man in the world that I would wrong in money matters. I have got a stern account against him, and I will begin it by speaking the truth and giving him back his own.’

Here the interview was interrupted by an honest miner, one Jim Davies. He came in hurriedly, and, like people of that class, thrust everybody else’s business out of his way. ‘ You are wanted at the mine, Mr. Hope. The shoring of the old works is giving way, and there’s a deal of water collecting in another part.’

‘ I’ll come at once,’ said Hope ; ‘ the men’s lives must not be endangered. Have the cage ready.’ Jim walked away.

Hope turned to Bartley.

‘ Pray understand, Mr. Bartley, that this is my last visit to your mine.’

‘ One moment, Hope,’ cried Bartley in des-

pair. 'We have been friends so long, surely you owe me something.'

'I do.'

'Well, then, I'll make you rich for life if you will but let Mary return to me and only just be silent; speak neither for me nor against me; surely that is not much for an old friend to ask. What is your answer?'

'That I will speak the truth, and keep my conscience and my child.'

This answer literally crushed Bartley. His very knees knocked together; he leaned against the palings sick at heart. He saw that Colonel Clifford would extort not only Walter's legacy, but what the lawyers call the mesne profits—that is to say, the interest and the various proceeds from the fraud during fourteen years.

Whilst he was in this condition of bodily collapse and mental horror, a cold cynical voice dropped icicles, so to speak, into his ear:

'In a fix, governor, eh? The girl won't come back, and Hope won't hold his tongue.'

Bartley looked round in amazement and saw the cadaverous face and diabolical sneer of Leonard Monckton. Fourteen years and evil passions had furrowed that bloodless cheek ; but there was no mistaking the man. It was a surprise to Bartley to see him there, and he spoken to by a knave who had tried to rob him ; but he was too full of his immediate trouble to think much of minor things.

‘What do you know about it?’ said he, roughly.

‘I’ll tell you,’ said Monckton, coolly.

He then walked in a most leisurely way to the gate that led into the meadow, whose eastern boundary was Hope’s quickset hedge, and he came in the same leisurely way up to Mr. Bartley, and leaned his back, with his hands behind him, with perfect effrontery, against the palings.

‘I know all,’ said he. ‘I overheard you in your office fourteen years ago, when you changed children with Hope.’

Bartley uttered an exclamation of dismay.

‘And I’ve been hovering about here all day, and watched the little game, and now I am fly, and no mistake.’

Bartley threw up his hands in dismay : ‘Then it’s all over ; I am doubly ruined. I can not hope to silence you both.’

‘Don’t speak so loud, governor.’

‘Why not ?’ said Bartley. ‘Others will, if I don’t.’ He lowered his voice for all that, and wondered what was coming.

‘Listen to me,’ said Monckton, exchanging his cynical manner for a quiet and weighty one.

Bartley began to wonder and look at him with a sort of awe. The words now dropped out of Monckton’s thin lips as if they were chips of granite, so full of meaning was every syllable, and Bartley felt it.

‘It’s not so bad as it looks. There are only two men that know you are a felon.’

Bartley winced visibly.

‘Now one of those men is to be bought’—
Bartley lifted his head with a faint gleam of

hope at that—‘and the other—has gone—down a coal mine.’

‘What good will that do me?’

The villain paused, and looked Bartley in the face.

‘That depends. Suppose you were to offer me what you offered Hope, and suppose Hope—was never—to come—again.’

‘No such luck,’ said Bartley, shaking his head sorrowfully.

‘Luck?’ said Monckton, contemptuously; ‘we make our own luck. Do you see that vagabond lying under the tree? That’s Ben Burnley.’

‘Ah!’ said Bartley; ‘the ruffian Hope discharged.’

‘The same, and a man that is burning to be revenged on him. *He’s* your luck, Mr. Bartley. I know the man, and what he has done in a mine before to-day.’

Then he drew near to Bartley’s ear, and hissed into it these fearful words:

‘Send him down the mine; promise him

five hundred pounds—if William Hope—never comes up again—and William Hope never will.’

Bartley drew back aghast ‘Assassination!’ he cried; and by a generous impulse of horror he half fled from the tempter. But Monckton followed him up, and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

‘Hush,’ said he; ‘you are getting too near that window, and it is open. Let me see there’s nobody outside.’

He looked in. There was nobody. Grace was upstairs, but it did so happen that she came into the room soon after.

‘Nothing of the kind. Accident. Accidents will happen in mines, and, talking of luck, this mine was declared dangerous this very day.’

‘No, no!’ groaned Bartley, trembling in every limb. ‘It’s a horrible crime; I dare not risk it.’

‘It is but a risk. The alternative is certain. You will be indicted for fraud by the Cliffords.’

Bartley groaned.

‘They’ll live in your home, they’ll revel in your money, while you wear a cropped head—and a convict dress—in a stone cell at Portland.’

‘No, never!’ screamed Bartley. ‘Man, man, you are tempting me to my perdition.’

‘I am saving you. Just consider—where is the risk? It is only an accident, and who will suspect you? Men don’t ruin their own mines. Here, just let me call him.’

Bartley made a faint gesture to forbid it, but Monckton pretended to take that as an assent.

‘Hi, Ben,’ he cried, ‘come here.’

‘No, no!’ cried Bartley; ‘I’ll have nothing to do with him.’

‘Well,’ said Monckton, ‘then don’t, but hear what he has got to say; he’ll tell you how easily accidents happen in a mine.’

Then Burnley came in, but stood at some distance. Bartley turned his back upon them both, and edged away from them a little; but Monckton stood between the two men, determined to bring them together.

‘ Ben,’ said he, ‘ Mr. Bartley takes you on again at my request ; no thanks to Mr. Hope.’

‘ No, curse him ; I know that.’

‘ Talking of that, Ben, how was it that you got rid of that troublesome overseer in the Welsh colliery ?’

Ben started and looked aghast for a moment, but soon recovered himself, and told his tale of blood, with a strange mixture of satisfaction and awe, washing his hands in the air nervously all the time.

‘ Well, you see, sir, we put some gun-cotton in a small canister, with a fuse cut to last four minutes, and hid it in one of the old workings the men had left ; then they telt t’ overseer they thowt t’ water was coming in by quickly. He got there just in time ; and what with t’ explosion, fire-damp, and fallen coal, we never saw t’ overseer again.’

‘ Dear me !’ said Monckton ; ‘ and Mr. Hope has gone down the mine expressly to inspect old workings. Is it not a strange coincidence ? Now, if such an accident was to

befall Mr. Hope, it's my belief Mr. Bartley would give you five hundred pounds.'

Bartley made no reply ; the perspiration was pouring down his face, and he looked a picture of abject guilt and terror.

Monckton looked at him, and decided for him. He went softly, like a cat, to Ben Burnley, and said, 'If an accident does occur, and that man never comes up again, you are to have five hundred pounds.'

'Five hundred pounds !' shouted Ben. 'I'll do t' job. Nay, *nay*, but,' said he—and his countenance fell—'they will not let me go down the mine.'

The diabolical agent went cat-like to Bartley.

'Please give me a written order to let this man go to work again in the mine.'

Bartley trembled and hesitated, but at last took out his pocket-book, and wrote on a leaf:

'Take Burnley on again.'

'R. BARTLEY.'

Whilst writing it his hand shook, and when it was written he would not tear it out. He panted and quivered, and was as pale as ashes, and said, ‘No, no, it’s a death-warrant; I cannot;’ and his trembling hand tried to convey the note-book back to his pocket, but it fell from his shaking fingers, and Monckton took it up, and quietly tore the leaf out, and took it across to Burnley, in spite of a feeble gesture the struggling wretch made to detain him. He gave Ben the paper, and whispered, ‘Be off, before he changes his mind.’

‘You’ll hear of an accident in the mine before the day’s over,’ said Burnley; and he went off without a grain of remorse under the double stimulus of revenge and lucre.

‘He’ll do it,’ cried Monckton, triumphantly, ‘and Hope will end his days in the Bartley mine.’

These words were hardly out of his lips when Grace Hope walked out of the house, pale, and with her eyes gleaming, and walked rapidly past them. She had nothing on her

head but a white handkerchief that was tied under her chin. Her appearance and her manner struck the conspirators with terror. Bartley stood aghast, but the more resolute villain seized her as she passed him. She was not a bit frightened at that, but utterly amazed. It was a public road.

‘How dare you touch me, you villain!’ she cried. ‘Let me go. Ah, I shall know you again, with your face like a corpse and your villainous eyes. Let me go, or I’ll have you hung.’

‘Where are you going?’ said Bartley, trembling.

‘To my father.’

‘He is not your father; it is a conspiracy. You must come home with me.’

‘Never!’ cried Grace, and by a sudden and violent effort she flung Monckton off.

But Bartley, mad with terror, seized her that moment, and gave Monckton time to recover and seize her again by the arm.

‘You are not of age,’ cried Bartley; ‘you

are under my authority, and you shall come home with me.'

'No, no!' cried Grace. 'Help! help! murder! help!'

She screamed and struggled so violently that with all their efforts they could hardly hold her. Then the devil Monckton began to cry louder still: 'She's mad, she's mad; help! to secure a mad woman.' This terrified Grace Hope. She had read of the villainies that had been done under cover of that accusation, which, indeed, has too often prevented honest men from interfering with deeds of lawless violence. But she had all her wits about her, woman's wit included. She let them drag her past the cottage door. Then she cried out with delight: 'Ah, here is my father.' They followed the direction of her eye, and relaxed their grasp. Instantly she drew her hands vigorously downward, got clear of them, gave them each a furious push that sent them flying forward, then darted back through the open door, closed it, and bolted it inside just as

Monckton, recovering himself, quickly dashed furiously against it—in vain.

The quick-witted villain saw the pressing danger in a moment: ‘To the back door, or we are lost!’ he yelled. Bartley dashed round to that door with a cry of dismay.

But Grace was before him just half a minute. She ran through the house.

Alas! the infernal door was secure. The woman had locked it when she went out. Grace came flying back to the front, and drew the bolt softly. But as she did so she heard a hammering, and found the door was fast. Unluckily Hope’s tool basket was on the window-ledge, and Monckton drove a heavy nail obliquely through the bottom of the door, and it was immovable. Then Grace slipped with cat-like step to the window, and had her hand on the sill to vault clean out into the road; she was perfectly capable, it being one of her calisthenic exercises. But here again her watchful enemy encountered her. He raised his hammer as if to strike her hand—though

perhaps he might not have gone that length—but she was a woman, and drew back at that cruel gesture. Instantly he closed the outside shutters; he didn't trouble about the window; but these outside shutters he proceeded to nail up; and, as the trap was now complete, he took his time, and by natural reaction from his fears, he permitted himself to exult a little.

‘Thank you, Mr. Hope, for the use of your tools.’ (Rat-tat.) ‘There, my little bird, you're caged.’ (Rat-tat-tat.) ‘Did you really think’ (rat-tat) ‘two men’ (rat-tat-tat) ‘were to be beaten by one woman?’

The prisoner thus secured, he drew aside with justifiable pride to admire his work. This action enabled him to see the side of the cottage he had secured so cleverly in front and behind, and there was Grace Hope coming down from her bedroom window. She had tied two crimson curtains together by a useful knot, which is called at sea a fisherman's bend; fastened one end to the bed or something, and she was coming down this extemporised rope

hand over hand alternately with as much ease and grace as if she was walking down marble steps. Monckton flung his arm and body wildly over the paling, and grabbed her with his finger-ends. She gave a spang with her heels against the wall, and took a bold leap away from him into a tulip bed ten feet distant at least. He yelled to Bartley, 'To the garden,' and, not losing a moment, flung his leg over the paling to catch her with Bartley's help in this new trap. Grace dashed on without a moment's hesitation at the quickset hedge. She did not run up to it and hesitate, like a woman, for it was not to be wriggled through; she went at it with the momentum and impetus of a racehorse, and through it as if it was made of blotting-paper, leaving a wonderfully small hole, but some shreds of her dress, and across the meadow at a pace that neither Bartley nor Monckton, men past their prime, could hope to rival even if she had not got the start. They gazed aghast at one another; at the premises so suddenly emptied as if by magic; at the

crimson curtain floating like a banner, and glowing beautifully amongst the green creepers ; and at that flying figure, with her hair that glittered in the sun, and streamed horizontal in the wind with her velocity ; flying to the mine to save William Hope, and give these baffled conspirators a life of penal servitude.

CHAPTER XX.

CALAMITY.

THE baffled conspirators saw Grace Hope bound over a stile like a deer and dash up to the mine ; then there was a hurried colloquy, and some men were seen to start from the mine and run towards Hope's cottage. What actually took place was this : she arrived panting, and begged to be sent down the mine at once ; the deputy said, ' You cannot, Miss, without an order from Mr. Hope.'

' I am his daughter, sir,' said she ; ' he has claimed me from Mr. Bartley this day.'

At that word the man took off his hat to her.

' Let me down this instant, there's a plot to fire the mine, and destroy my dear father.'

‘A plot to fire the mine!’ said the man all aghast. ‘Why? Who by? Hi! cage ready there!’

‘One Burnley, but he’s bribed by a stranger. Send me down to warn my father; but you run and seize that villain; you cannot mistake him. He wears a light suit of tweed, all one colour. He has very black eyebrows, and a face like a corpse, and a large gold ring on the little finger of his right hand. You will find him somewhere near my father’s cottage. Neither you nor I have a moment to lose.’

Then the deputy called three more men, and made for Hope’s cottage, while Grace went down in the cage.

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Bartley fled in mortal terror to his own house, and began to pack up his things to leave the country. Monckton withdrew to the clump of fir trees, and from that thin shelter watched the mine, intending to levant as soon as he should see Hope come up safe and sound; but when he saw three or four men start from

the mine and run across to him, he took the alarm and sought the thicker shelter of a copse hard by. It was very thick cover, good for temporary concealment ; but he soon found it was so narrow that he couldn't emerge from it on either side without being seen at once, and his quick wit told him that Grace had denounced him, and, probably described him accurately to the miners ; he was in mortal terror, but not unprepared for this sort of danger. The first thing he did was to whip off his entire tweed suit and turn it inside out ; he had had it made on purpose, it was a thin tweed, doubled with black kerseymere, so that this change was a downright transformation. Then he substituted a black tie for a coloured one, whipped out a little mirror and his hare's-foot, &c., browned and coloured his cheek, put on an admirable grey wig, whiskers, moustache and beard, and partly whitened his eyebrows, and hobbled feebly out of the little wood an infirm old man. Presently he caught sight of his gold ring. ' Ah ! ' said he, ' she is a sharp girl ; perhaps

she noticed that in the struggle?' He took it off, and was going to put it in his pocket, but thought better of that, and chucked it into a ditch. Then he made for the village. The pursuers hunted about the house and, of course, didn't find him ; but, presently one of them saw him crossing a meadow not far off, so they ran towards him and hailed him :

‘ Hi ! mister ! ’

He went feebly on and did not seem to hear ; then they hailed him again and ran towards him. Then he turned and stopped, and, seeing men running towards him, took out a large pair of round spectacles, and put them on to look at them. By this artifice, that which in reality completed his disguise seemed but a natural movement in an old man to see better who it was that wanted him.

‘ What be you doing here ? ’ said the man.

‘ Well, my good man,’ said Monckton, affecting surprise, ‘ I have been visiting an old friend, and now I’m going home again. I hope

I am not trespassing. Is not this the way to the village? They told me it was.'

'That's right enough,' said the deputy, 'but by the way you come you must have seen him.'

'No, sir,' said Monckton, 'I haven't seen anybody except one gentleman that came through that wood there as I passed it.'

'What was he like, sir?'

'Well, I didn't take particular notice, and he passed me all in a hurry.'

'That would be the man,' said the deputy. 'Had he a very pale face?'

'Not that I remarked; he seemed rather heated with running.'

'How was he dressed, sir?'

'Oh, like many of the young people; all of one pattern.'

'Light or dark?'

'Light, I think.'

'Was it a tweed suit?'

'I almost think it was. What had he been doing? Anything wrong? He seemed to me to be rather scared like.'

‘Which way did he go, sir?’

‘I think he made for that great house, sir.’

‘Come on,’ said the deputy, and he followed this treacherous indication, hot in pursuit.

Monckton lost no time. He took off twenty years, and reached the Dun Cow as an old acquaintance. He hired the one vehicle the establishment possessed, and was off like a shot to Derby; thence he despatched a note to his lodgings to say he was suddenly called to town, but should be back in a week. Not that he ever intended to show his face in that neighbourhood again.

Nevertheless events occurred that stopped both his flight and Bartley’s, and yet broke up their unholy alliance.

It was Hope’s final inspection of the Bartley mine, and he took things in order. Months ago a second shaft had been sunk by his wise instructions, and but for Bartley’s parsimony would have been now completed. Hope now ascertained how many feet it was short, and noted this down for Bartley.

Then still inspecting he went to the other extremity of the mine and reached a sort of hall or amphitheatre much higher than the passages. This was a centre with diverging passages on one side, but closed on the other. Two of these passages led by oblique routes to those old works, the shoring of which had been reported unsafe.

This amphitheatre was now a busy scene : empty trucks being pushed off, full trucks being pushed on, all the men carrying lighted lanterns that wavered and glinted like ‘wills o’ the wisp.’ Presently a bell rung, and a portion of the men, to whom this was a signal, left off work and began to put on their jackets and to await the descent of the cage to take them up in parties. At this moment Hope met, to his surprise, a figure that looked like Ben Burnley. He put up his lamp to see if he was right, and Ben Burnley it was. The ruffian had the audacity to put up his lamp, as if to scrutinise the person who examined him.

‘Did I not discharge you?’ said Hope.

‘ Ay, lad ! ’ said Ben. ‘ But your master put me on again. ’ With that he showed Bartley’s order and signature.

Hope bit his lips, but merely said ‘ He will rue it. ’ Burnley sidled away ; but Hope cried to one or two men who were about :

‘ Keep a sharp look out on him, my men : your lives are not safe whilst he’s in the mine. ’

Burnley leaned insolently against a truck and gave the men nothing to observe ; the next minute in bustled the honest miner, at whose instance Hope had come down the mine, and begged him to come and visit the shoring at once.

Hope asked if there were any other men there ; the miner replied in the negative.

‘ Very well, then, ’ said Hope, ‘ I’ll just take one look at the water here, and I’ll be at the shoring in five minutes. ’

Unfortunately this unwary statement let Burnley know exactly what to do ; he had already concealed in the wood-work a canister of dynamite and a fuse to it to last about five

minutes. He now wriggled away under cover of Hope's dialogue and lighted the fuse, then he came flying back to get safe out of the mine, and leave Hope in his death-trap.

But in the meantime Grace Hope came down in the cage, and caught sight of her father and came screaming to him : ' Father ! father ! '

' You here, my child ? '

' There's a plot to murder you ! A man called Burnley is to cause an explosion at the old works just as you visit them. '

' An explosion,' cried Hope, ' and fire-damp about. One explosion will cause fifty. Ring the bell—here men, danger ! '

Then there was a rush of men.

' Ben Burnley is firing the mine. '

There was a yell of fury ; but a distant explosion turned it to one of dismay. Hope caught his daughter up in his arms, and put her into a cavity.

' Fly, men, to the other part of the mine,' he cried.

There was a louder explosion. In ran

Burnley terrified at his own work, and flying to escape. Hope sprang out upon him : ‘ No you don’t—living or dead—you are the last to leave this mine.’

Burnley struggled furiously, but Hope dashed him down at his feet. Just as a far more awful explosion than all took place, one side of that amphitheatre fell in and the very earth heaved. The corner part of the shaft fell in upon the cage and many poor miners who were hoping to escape by it ; but those escaped for the present who had obeyed Hope’s order and fled to another part of the mine, and when the stifling vapours drifted away there stood Hope pale as death, but strong as iron, with the assassin at his feet ; and poor Grace crouching and quivering in her recess. Their fate now awaited these three : a speedy death by choke-damp ; or a slow death by starvation ; or a rescue from the outside under circumstances of unparalleled difficulty, since there was but one shaft completed, and that was now closed by a mountain of *débris*.

CHAPTER XXI.

BURIED ALIVE.

THE explosions so tremendously loud below were but muffled sounds at the pit's mouth, but alas ! these muffled sounds and one flash of lurid flame that shot up into the air told the tale of horror to every experienced pitman and his wife, and the cry of a whole village went up to heaven.

The calamity spread like wildfire. It soon found its way to Clifford Hall, and the deputy ran himself with the news to Mr. Bartley. Bartley received it at first with a stony glare, and trembled all over ; then the deputy, lowering his voice, said, ' Sir, the worst of it is there is foul play in it. There is good authority to say

that Ben Burnley fired the mine to destroy his betters, and he has done it, for Mr. Hope and Miss Hope that is—Miss Bartley that was—are both there.’ He added in a broken voice, ‘and if they are not buried or stifled it will be hard work to save them. The mine is a ruin.’

Bartley delivered a wild scream, and dashed out of the house at once ; he did not even take his hat, but the deputy, more self-possessed, took one out of the hall and followed him.

Bartley hurried to the mine and found that several stout fellows had gone down with their pickaxes and other tools to clear the shaft, but that it must be terribly slow work, so few men could work at a time in that narrow space. Bartley telegraphed to Derby for a more powerful steam engine and experienced engineers, and set another gang to open the new shaft to the bottom, and see if any sufferers could be saved that way. Whatever he did was wise, but his manner was frenzied. None of his people thought he had so much feeling, and more than one of the quaking women gave him a kind

word ; he made no reply, he did not even seem to hear. He wandered about the mine all night wringing his hands, and at last he was taken home almost by force.

Humanity overpowered prejudice, and Colonel Clifford came to the mine to see if he could be of any use to the sufferers. He got hold of the deputy and learned from him what Bartley was doing. He said he thought that was the best course, as there would be division of labour ; but said he, ‘I am an old campaigner, and I know that men cannot fight without food, and this work will be a fight. How will you house the new comers ?’

‘There are forty-seven men missing, and the new men can sleep in their cottages.’

‘That’s so,’ said the Colonel, ‘but there are the wives and the children. I shall send sleeping tents and eating tents, and provisions enough to feed a battalion. Forty-seven lives,’ said he, pityingly.

‘Ay, sir,’ said the deputy, ‘and such lives, some of them ; for Mr. Hope and Miss Mary

Bartley—leastways that is not her name now, she's Mr. Hope's daughter.'

'Why, what has she to do with it?'

'I am sorry to say, sir, she is down the mine.'

'God forbid,' said the Colonel, 'that noble girl dead, or in mortal danger.'

'She is, sir, and'—lowering his voice—'by foul play,' then seeing the Colonel greatly shocked and moved, he said, 'and I ought not to keep it from you. You are our nearest magistrate; the young lady told me at the pit-mouth she is Mr. Hope's daughter.'

'And so she is.'

'And she said there was a plot to destroy her father in the mine by exploding the old workings he was going to visit. One Ben Burnley was to do it, a blackguard that has a spite against Mr. Hope for discharging him. But there was money behind him, and a villain that she described to us—black eye-brows, a face like a corpse, and dressed in a suit of tweed one colour. We hoped that she might have

been mistaken, or she might have warned Mr. Hope in time ; but now it is to be seen that there was no mistake, and she had not time to warn him. The deed is done ; and a darker deed was never done, even in the dark.'

Colonel Clifford groaned—after a while he said : ' Seize that Ben Burnley at once, or he will soon leave this place behind him.'

' No, he won't,' said the deputy. ' He is in the mine, that is one comfort ; and if he comes out alive his life won't be worth much, with the law on one side of the blackguard and Judge Lynch on t' other.'

' The first thing,' said the Colonel, ' is to save these precious lives. God help us and them.'

He then went to the railway, and wired certain leading tradesmen in Derby for provisions, salt and fresh, on a large scale, and for new tents. He had some old ones stored away in his own house. He also secured abundance of knives, forks, plates, buckets, pitchers, and jugs. and, in short, he opened a *commissariat*.

He inquired for his son Walter, and why he was so late. He could learn nothing but that Walter had mounted a hunter and left word with Baker that he should not be home till eight o'clock.

‘John,’ said the Colonel, solemnly, ‘I am in great trouble, and Walter is in worse, I fear. Let nobody speak to him about this accident at the mine till he has seen me.’

Walter Clifford rode to the Lake Hotel to inquire after the bracelet. The landlady told him she had sent her husband over with it that day.

‘Confound it,’ said Walter; ‘why, he won’t know who to take it to.’

‘Oh, it’s all right, sir,’ said she. ‘My Sam won’t give it to the wrong person, you may be sure.’

‘How do I know that?’ said Walter; ‘and, pray, who did you tell him to give it to?’

‘Why, to the lady as was here with you.’

‘And how the deuce is he to find her? He

does not know her name. It's a great pity you could not keep it till I came.'

'Well, sir, you was so long a-coming.'

'That's true,' said Walter; 'let us make the best of it. I shall feed my horse, and get home as quickly as I can.'

However, he knew he would be late, and thought he had better go straight home. He sent a telegram to Mary Bartley: 'Landlord gone to you with bracelet,' and this he signed with the name of the landlady, but no address. He was afraid to say more; though he would have liked to put his wife upon her guard; but he trusted to her natural shrewdness. He mounted his horse and went straight home, but he was late for dinner, and that vexed him a little, for it was a matter Colonel Clifford was particular about. He dashed up to his bedroom and began to dress all in a hurry.

John Baker came to him wearing a very extraordinary look, and after some hesitation said: 'I would not change my clothes if I were you, Mr. Walter.'

‘Oh,’ said Walter, ‘I am too late, you know; in for a penny, in for a pound.’

‘But, sir,’ said old John, ‘the Colonel wants to speak to you in the drawing-room.’

Now Walter was excited with the events of the day, irritated by the affront his father had put upon him and Mary, strung up by hard riding, &c., he burst out: ‘Well, I shall not go to him; I have had enough of this—badgered and bullied, and my sweetheart affronted—and now I suppose I am to be lectured again; you say I am not well, and bring my dinner up here.’

‘No, Mr. Walter,’ said the old man, gravely: ‘I must not do that. Sir, don’t you think as you are to be scolded, or the angel you love affronted; all that is over for ever. There has been many a strange thing happened since you rode out of our stable last, but I wish you would go to the Colonel and let him tell you all; however, I suppose I may tell you so much as this, that your sweetheart is not Mary Bartley at all; she is Mr. Hope’s daughter.’

‘What!’ cried Walter, in utter amazement.

‘There is no doubt about it, sir,’ said the old man, ‘and I believe it is all out about you and her, but that would not matter, for the Colonel he takes it quite different from what you might think. He swears by her now. I don’t know really how that came about, sir, for I was not there, but when I was dressing the Colonel he said to me, “John, she’s the grandest girl in England, and an honour to her sex, and there is not a drop of Bartley’s blood in her.”’

‘Oh, he has found that out,’ said Walter. ‘Then I’ll go to him like a bird, dear old fellow. So that is what he wanted to tell me.’

‘No,’ said John Baker, gravely.

‘No,’ said Walter ; ‘what then?’

‘It’s trouble.’

‘Trouble,’ said Walter, puzzled.

‘Ay, my poor, young master,’ said Baker tenderly, ‘sore trouble, such trouble as a father’s heart won’t let me, or any man break to you, whilst he lives to do it. I know my master. Ever since that fellow Bartley came here we have seen the worst of him ; now we shall see

the best of him. Go to him, dear Master Walter. Don't waste time in talking to old John Baker. Go to your father and your friend.'

Walter Clifford cast a look of wonder and alarm on the old man, and went down at once to the drawing-room. His father was standing by the fire. He came forward to him with both hands, and said :

'My son !'

'Father,' said Walter in a whisper, 'what is it?'

'Have you heard nothing?'

'Nothing but good news, father—that you approve my choice.'

'Ah, John told you that?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And did he tell you anything else?'

'No, sir, only that some great misfortune is upon me, and that I have my father's sympathy.'

'You have,' said the Colonel, 'and would to God I had known the truth before. She is not Bartley's daughter at all; she is Hope's

daughter. Her virtue shines in her face ; she is noble, she is self-denying, she is just, she is brave ; and no doubt she can account for her being at the Lake Hotel in company with some man or other. Whatever that lady says will be the truth. That's not the trouble, Walter ; all that has become small by comparison. But shall we ever see her sweet face again, or hear her voice ? '

'Father,' said Walter, trembling, 'you terrify me. This sudden change in your voice that I never heard falter before ; some great calamity must have happened. Tell me the worst at once.'

'Walter,' said the old man, 'stand firm ; do not despair, for there is hope.'

'Thank God for that, father ; now tell me all '

'Walter, there has been an explosion in the mine—a fearful explosion ; the shaft has fallen in ; there is no getting access to the mine, and all the poor souls confined there are in mortal peril. Those who are best acquainted

with the mine do not think that many of them have been destroyed by the ruin, but they tell me these explosions let loose poisonous gases, and so now those poor souls are all exposed to three deadly perils—choke-damp, fire-damp, and starvation.'

'It's pitiable,' said Walter, 'but surely this is a calamity to Bartley, and to the poor miners, but not to anyone that I love, and that you have learned to respect.'

'My son,' said the Colonel solemnly, 'the mine was fired by foul play.'

'Is it possible?'

'It is believed that some rival owner, or else some personal enemy of William Hope, bribed a villain to fire some part of the mine that Hope was inspecting.'

'Great Heavens!' said Walter, 'can such villains exist? Poor, poor Mr. Hope! who would think he had an enemy in the world?'

'Alas!' said the Colonel, 'that is not all. His daughter, it seems, overheard the villain bribing the ruffian to commit this foul and

terrible act, and she flew to the mine directly. She despatched some miners to seize that hellish villain, and she went down the mine to save her father.'

'Ah!' said Walter, trembling all over.

'She has never been seen since.'

The Colonel's head sank for a moment on his breast.

Walter groaned and turned pale.

'She came too late to save him; she came in time to share his fate.'

Walter sank into a chair, and a deadly pallor overspread his face, his forehead, and his very lips.

The Colonel rushed to the door, and called for help, and in a moment John Baker and Mrs. Milton and Julia Clifford were round poor Walter's chair with brandy and ether and salts, and every stimulant. He did not faint away; strong men very seldom do at any mere mental shock.

The colour came slowly back to his cheeks and his pale lips, and his eyes began to fill

with horror. The weeping women, and even the stout Colonel, viewed with anxiety his return to the full consciousness of his calamity.

‘Be brave,’ cried Colonel Clifford; ‘be a soldier’s son; don’t despair; fight; nothing has been neglected. Even Bartley is playing the man; he has got another engine coming up, and another body of workmen to open the new shaft as well as the old one.’

‘God bless him!’ said Walter.

‘And I have an experienced engineer on the road, and the things civilians always forget—tents and provisions of all sorts. We will set an army to work sooner than your sweetheart, poor girl, shall lose her life by any fault of ours.’

‘My sweetheart!’ cried Walter, starting suddenly from his chair. ‘There, don’t cling to me, women. No man shall head that army but I. My sweetheart! God help me—SHE’S MY WIFE!’

CHAPTER XXII.

REMORSE.

IN a work of this kind not only the external incidents should be noticed, but also what may be called the mental events. We have seen a calamity produce a great revulsion in the feelings of Colonel Clifford ; but, as for Robert Bartley, his very character was shaken to the foundation by his crime and its terrible consequences. He was now like a man who had glided down a soft sunny slope and was suddenly arrested at the brink of a fathomless precipice. Bartley was cunning, selfish, avaricious, unscrupulous in reality, so long as he could appear respectable, but he was not violent, nor physically reckless, still less cruel. A deed of blood shocked him as much as it

would shock an honest man. Yet now, through following his natural bent too far, and yielding to the influence of a remorseless villain, he found his own hands stained with blood—the blood of a man who after all had been his best friend, and had led him to fortune ; and the blood of an innocent girl, who had not only been his pecuniary benefactress for a time, but had warmed and lighted his house with her beauty and affection.

Busy men, whose views are all external, are even more apt than others to miss the knowledge of their own minds. This man, to whom everything was business, had taken for granted he did not actually love Grace Hope. Why, she was another man's child. But now he had lost her for ever, he found he had mistaken his own feelings. He looked round his gloomy horizon and realized too late that he did love her ; it was not a great and penetrating love like William Hope's—he was incapable of such a sentiment—but what affection he had to bestow, he had given to

this sweet creature. His house was dark without her ; he was desolate and alone, and, horrible to think of, the instrument of her assassination. This thought drove him to frenzy, and his frenzy took two forms, furious excitement and gloomy despair ; this was now his life by night and day, for sleep deserted him. At the mine his measures were all wise, but his manner very wild : the very miners whispered amongst themselves that he was going mad. At home, on the contrary, he was gloomy, with sullen despair. He was in this latter condition the evening after the explosion, when a visitor was announced. Thinking it was some one from the mine, he said faintly, ‘Admit him,’ and then his despondent head dropped on his breast ; indeed, he was in a sort of lethargy, worn out with his labours, his remorse, and his sleeplessness.

In that condition his ear was suddenly jarred by a hard, metallic voice, whose tone was somehow opposed to all the voices with which goodness and humanity have ever spoken.

‘Well, governor, here’s a slice of luck.’

Bartley shivered. ‘Is that the devil speaking to me?’ he muttered, without looking up.

‘No,’ said Monckton jauntily, ‘only one of his servants, and your best friend.’

‘My friend?’ said Bartley, turning his chair and looking at him with a sort of dull wonder.

‘Ay,’ said Monckton, ‘your friend; the man that found you brains and resolution, and took you out of the hole, and put Hope and his daughter in it instead; no, not his daughter, she did that for us, she was so clever.’

‘Yes,’ said Bartley wildly, ‘it was you who made me an assassin. But for you, I should only have been a knave; now I am a murderer—thanks to you.’

‘Come, governor,’ said Monckton, ‘no use looking at one side of the picture. You tried other things first. You made him liberal offers, you know; but he would have war to the knife, and he has got it. He is buried at the bottom of that shaft.’

‘God forbid!’

‘And you are all right.’

‘I am in Hell,’ shrieked Bartley.

‘Well, come out of it,’ said Monckton, ‘and let’s talk sense. I—I read the news at Derby, just as I was starting for London. I have been as near the mine as I thought safe. They seem to be very busy clearing out both shafts—two steam engines; constant relays of workmen. Who has got the job in hand?’

‘I have,’ said Bartley.

‘Well, that’s clever of you to throw dust in their eyes, and put our little game off your own shoulders. You want to save appearances? You know you cannot save William Hope.’

‘I can save him, and I will save him. God will have mercy on a penitent assassin, as He once had upon a penitent thief.’

Monckton stared at him and smiled:

‘Who has been talking to you? The parson?’

‘My own conscience. I abhor myself as much as I do you, you black villain.’

‘Ah!’ said Monckton, with a wicked glance, ‘that’s how a man patters before he splits upon his pals, to save his own skin. Now, look here, old man, before you split on me ask yourself who had the greatest interest in this job. You silenced a dangerous enemy, but what have I gained? you ought to square with me first as you promised. If you split upon me before that, you will put yourself in the hole and leave me out of it.’

‘Villain and fool,’ said Bartley, ‘these trifles do not trouble me now. If Hope and my dear Mary are found dead in that mine, I’ll tell how they came by their death, and I’ll die by my own hand.’

Monckton said nothing, but looked at him keenly, and began at last to feel uneasy.

‘A shaft is but a narrow thing,’ Bartley rejoined; ‘why should they be buried alive? let’s get to them before they are starved to death. We may save them yet.’

‘Why, you fool, they’ll denounce us!’

‘What do I care? I would save them both to-night if I was to stand in the dock to-morrow.’

‘And swing on the gallows next week, or end your days in a prison.’

‘I’d take my chance,’ said Bartley desperately. ‘I’ll undo my crime if I can. No punishment can equal the agony I am in now, thanks to you, you villain.’

Then turning on him suddenly, and showing him the white of his eyes like a maniac, or a dangerous mastiff, he hissed out: ‘You think nothing of the lives of better men; perhaps you don’t value your own.’

‘Oh, I beg your pardon,’ said Monckton. ‘That’s a very different thing.’

‘Oh, you do value your own foul life?’

‘At any amount of money,’ said Monckton.

‘Then why do you risk it?’

‘Excuse me, governor, that’s a thing I make a point of not doing. I risk my instruments not my head; Ben Burnley to wit.’

‘ You are risking it now,’ said Bartley, looking still more strangely at him.

‘ How so, pray ? ’ said Monckton, getting a little uneasy, for this was not the Bartley he had known till then.

Bartley took the poker in his hand and proceeded to poke the fire ; but somehow he did not look at the fire. He looked askant at Monckton, and he showed the white of his eyes more and more. Monckton kept his eye upon him and put his hand upon the handle of the door.

‘ I’ll tell you,’ said Bartley, ‘ by coming here to tempt, provoke, and insult the wretch whose soul you destroyed by forcing me to assassinate the best man and the sweetest girl in England, when there were vipers and villains about, whom it’s a good action to sweep off God’s earth. Villain ! I’ll teach you to come like a fool and madden a madman. I was only a rogue, you have made me a man of blood. All the worse for you. I have mur-

dered *them*, I'll execute *you* ;' and with these words he bounded on him like a panther.

Monckton tore the doors open, and dashed out, but a furious blow fell before he was quite clear of the doorway. With such force was it delivered that the blunt metal cut into the edge of the door like a sword ; the jamb was smashed, and even Monckton, who received but one-fourth of the blow, fell with his hands and knees into the hall and was stunned for a moment, but, fearing worse, staggered out of the hall door, which luckily for him was open, and darting into a little grove of shrubs that was close by, grovelled there in silence, bleeding like a pig and waiting for his chance to escape entirely ; but the quaking reptile ran no further risk.

Bartley never followed him beyond his own room : he had been goaded into a maniacal impulse, and he returned to his gloomy sullenness.

Walter's declaration, made so suddenly

before four persons, startled them greatly for a moment; but only for a moment. Julia was the first to speak :

‘ We might have known it,’ she said : ‘ Mary Bartley is a young lady incapable of misconduct ; she is prudence, virtue, delicacy, and purity in person ; the man she was with at that place was sure to be her husband, and who should that be but Walter, whom she loved ? ’

Then the servants looked anxiously at their master to see how he took this startling revelation. Well, the Colonel stood firm as if he was at the head of a column in the field. He was not the man to retreat from any position ; he said, ‘ All we have to do is to save her ; then my house and arms are open to my son’s wife.’

‘ God bless you, father,’ cried Walter, in a broken voice ; ‘ and God bless you, dear cousin. Yes, it’s no time for words.’ And he was gone in a moment.

‘ Now, Milton,’ said the Colonel, ‘ he won’t sleep here till the work is done, and he won’t

sleep at all if we don't get a bed for him near the mine. You order the break out, and go to the Dun Cow, and do what you can for him.'

'That I will, sir; I'll take his own sheets and bedding with me. I won't trust that woman—she talks too much; and, if you please, sir, I'll stay there a day or two myself, for maybe I shall coax him to eat a morsel of my cooking, and to lie down a bit, when he would not listen to a stranger.'

'You're a faithful creature,' said the Colonel, rather aggressively, not choosing to break down, 'so are you, John; and it is at these moments we find out our friends in the house; and, confound you, I forbid you both to snivel,' said he, still louder. Then, more gravely: 'How do we know? many a stormy day ends well; this calamity may bring happiness and peace to a divided house.'

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Colonel Clifford prophesied right. Walter took the lead of a working gang and worked night and day, resting two hours only in the

twenty-four, and even that with great reluctance. Outside the scene was one of bustle and animation. Little white tents, for the strange workmen to sleep in, dotted the green, and two snowy refreshment tents were pitched outside the Dun Cow. That establishment had large brick ovens and boilers, and the landlady, and the women she had got to help her, kept the tables always groaning under solid fare that never once flagged, being under the charge of that old campaigner Colonel Clifford. The landlady tried to look sad at the occasion which called forth her energy and talents: but she was a woman of business, and her complacency oozed through her. Ah, it was not so at the pit-mouth; the poor wives whose husbands were entombed below, alive or dead, hovered and fluttered about the two shafts, with their aprons to their eyes, and eager with their questions. Deadly were their fears, their hopes fainter and fainter, as day after day went by, and both gangs, working in so narrow a space, made little progress, com-

pared with their own desires, and the prayers of those who trembled for the result. It was a race and a struggle of two gallant parties, and a short description of it will be given, but as no new incidents happened for six days we shall preserve the chronological order of events, and now relate a daring project which was revived in that interval.

Monckton and Bartley were now enemies. Sin had united, crime and remorse had dis-united, them. Monckton registered a vow of future vengeance upon his late associate ; but in the meantime, taking a survey of the present circumstances, he fell back upon a dark project he had conceived years ago on the very day when he was arrested for theft in Bartley's office.

Perhaps our readers, their memory disturbed by such a number of various matters as we have since presented to them, may have forgotten that project, but what is about to follow will tend to revive their recollection. Monckton then wired to Mrs. Braham's lawyer

demanding an immediate interview with that lady : he specified the hour.

The lawyer went to her directly, the matter being delicate. He found her in great distress, and before he could open his communication, she told him her trouble. She said that her husband, she feared, was going out of his mind ; he groaned all night, and never slept, and in the day time never spoke.

There had been just then some surprising falls and rises in foreign securities, and the shrewd lawyer divined at once that the stock-broker had been doing business on his own account, and got pinched, so he said, ‘ My dear madam, I suspect it is business on the Exchange ; he will get over that, but there is something that is immediately pressing,’ and he then gave her Monckton’s message.

Now her nerves were already excited, and this made matters worse. She cried and trembled, and became hysterical, and vowed she would never go near Leonard Monckton again ; he had never loved her, had never been a friend

to her as Jonathan Braham had. ‘No,’ she said; ‘if he wants money, take and sell my jewels; but I shall stay with my husband in his trouble.’

‘He is not your husband,’ said the lawyer, quietly; ‘and this man is your husband, and things have come to my knowledge lately which it would be imprudent at present to disclose either to him or you; but we are old friends. You cannot doubt that I have your interest at heart.’

‘No, I don’t doubt that,’ said Lucy hastily, and held out her hand to him.

‘Well, then,’ said he, ‘be persuaded and meet the man.’

‘No; I will not do that,’ said she. ‘I am not a good woman, I know; but it is not for want of the wish. I will not play double any more.’ And from that nothing he could say could move her.

The lawyer returned to his place, and when Monckton called next day he told him he was sorry to say Mr. Braham was ill and in trouble,

and the lady couldn't meet him. She would make any reasonable sacrifice for his convenience except that.

‘And I,’ said Monckton, ‘insist upon that, and nothing else.’

The lawyer endeavoured to soften him, and hinted that he would advance money himself sooner than his client should be tormented.

But Monckton was inflexible. He said, ‘It is about a matter that she cannot communicate to you; nor can I. However, I am obliged to you for your information. She won't leave her stock-broker, eh? Well, then, I know where to find her:’ and he took up his hat to go.

‘No, pray don't do that,’ said Mr. Middleton earnestly. ‘Let me try her again. She has had time to sleep over it.’

‘Try her,’ said Monckton, sternly, ‘and if you are her friend, take her husband's side in this one thing; it's the last time I shall trouble her.’

‘I am her friend,’ said the lawyer; ‘and if you must know, I rather wish her to meet you,

and get it over. Will you come here again at five o'clock ?'

'All right,' said Monckton.

Monckton was struck with Lawyer Middleton's manner, and went away puzzling over it.

'What's *his* little game, I wonder?' said he.

The lawyer went post-haste to his client's house. He found her in tears. She handed him an open letter.

Braham was utterly ruined, and, besides that, had done something or other he did not care to name; he was off to America, leaving her what money she could find in the house, and the furniture, which he advised her to sell at once, before others claimed it—in short, the man was wild with fear, and at present thought but little of anybody but himself.

Then the lawyer set himself to comfort her as well as he could, and renewed his request that she would give Monckton a meeting.

'Yes,' said she wearily; 'it's no use trying to resist *him*; he can come here.'

The lawyer demurred to that:

‘No,’ said he, ‘keep your own counsel; don’t let him know you are deserted and ruined; make a favour of coming, but *come*: and a word in your ear—he can do more for you than Braham can, or will ever, do again. So don’t you thwart him if you can help.’

She was quick enough to see there was something weighty behind, and she consented. He took her back with him; only she was such a long time removing the traces of tears, and choosing the bonnet she thought she should look best in, that she made him twenty minutes late and rather cross. It is a way women have of souring that honeycomb—a man.

When the trio met at the office the husband was pale; the wife dull and sullen.

‘It’s the last time I shall trouble you, Lucy,’ said Monckton.

‘As you please, Leonard.’

‘And I want you to make my fortune.’

‘You have only to tell me how’—quite incredulously.)

‘You must accompany me to Derbyshire, or else meet me at Derby, whichever you please. Oh, don’t be alarmed. I don’t ask you to travel with me as man and wife.’

‘It doesn’t much matter, I suppose,’ said Lucy doggedly.

‘Well, you are accommodating; I’ll be considerate.’

‘No doubt you will,’ said Lucy; then turning her glorious eyes full upon him, ‘WHAT’S THE CRIME?’

‘The Crime!’ said Monckton, looking all about the room to find it. ‘What crime?’

‘The crime I’m wanted for; all your schemes are criminal, you know.’

‘Well, you’re complimentary. It’s not a crime this time; it’s only a confession.’

‘Ah! What am I to confess? Bigamy?’

‘The idea! No. You are to confess—in a distant part of England, what you can deny in London next day—that on a certain day you married a gentleman called Walter Clifford.’

‘I’ll say that on the eleventh day of June, 1861, I married a gentleman who was called Walter Clifford.’

This was Lucy’s reply, and given very doggedly.

‘Bravo! and will you stand to it if the real Walter Clifford says it is a lie?’

Lucy reflected: ‘No, I will not.’

‘Well, well, we shall have time to talk about that; when can you start?’

‘Give me three days.’

‘All right.’

‘You won’t keep me there long after I have done this wicked thing.’

‘No, no. I will send you home with flying colours, and you shall have your share of the plunder.’

‘I’d rather go into service again and work my fingers to the bone.’

‘Since you have such a contempt for money, perhaps you’ll stand fifty pounds.’

‘I have no money with me, but I’ll ask Mr. Middleton to advance me some.’

She opened the door, and asked one of the clerks if she could see the principal for a moment. He came to her directly. She then said to him, 'He wants fifty pounds; could you let me have it for him?'

'Oh,' said the lawyer, cheerfully, 'I shall be happy to lend Mr. Monckton fifty or a hundred pounds upon his own note of hand.'

They both stared at him a little; but a blank note of hand was immediately produced, drawn and signed at six months' date for 52*l.* 10*s.*, and the lawyer gave Monckton his cheque for 50*l.* Husband and wife then parted for a time. Monckton telegraphed to his lodgings to say that his sister would come down with him for country air, and would require good accommodation, but would pay liberally.

In most mining accidents the shafts are clear, and the *débris* that has to be picked through to get to the entombed miners is attended with this advantage, that a great

number of men have room to use their arms and pickaxes, and the stuff has not to be sent up to the surface. But in this horrible accident both gangs of workers were confined to a small area and small cages, and the stuff had to be sent up to the surface.

Bartley, who seemed to live only to rescue the sufferers by his own fault, provided miles of rope, and had small cages knocked together, so that the *débris* was continually coming up from both the shafts, and one great source of delay was averted. But the other fatal cause of delay remained, and so daylight came and went, and the stars appeared and disappeared with incredible rapidity, to poor Walter and the other gallant workers, before they got within thirty feet of the pit: those who worked in the old shafts, having looser stuff to deal with, gained an advance of about seven feet upon the other working party, and this being reported to Walter he went down the other shaft to inspire the men by words and example. He had not been down

two hours when one of the miners cried, 'Hold hard, they are working up to us!' and work was instantly suspended for a moment. Then sure enough the sounds of pickaxes working below were just audible.

There was a roar of exultation from the rescuing party, and a man was sent up with his feet in a bucket, and clinging to a rope, to spread the joyful tidings; but the work was not intermitted for more than a moment, and in a few hours it became necessary to send the cage down and suspend the work to avoid another accident. The thin remaining crust gave way, the way was clear, lamps were sent down, and the saving party were soon in the mine, with a sight before them never to be forgotten.

The few men who stood erect with picks in their hands were men of rare endurance; and even they began to fall, exhausted with fatigue and hunger. Five times their number lay dotted about the mine, prostrated by privation, and some others, alas! were dead. None of the poor fellows were in a condition to give

a rational answer, though Walter implored them to say where Hope and his daughter were. These poor pale wretches, the shadows of their former selves, were sent up in the cages with all expedition, and received by Bartley, who seemed to forget nothing, for he had refreshment tents ready at the pit-mouth.

Meantime Walter and others, whose hearts were with him, ran wildly through the works, and groped on their knees; with their lamps to find Hope and his daughter, but they were not to be found, and nine miners beside them were missing, including Ben Burnley. Then Walter came wildly up to the surface, wringing his hands with agony, and crying ‘They are lost, they are lost!’

‘No,’ cried Bartley, ‘they must not be lost; they shall not be lost. One man has come to himself. I gave him port wine and brandy.’ Then he dragged the young man into the tent. There was stout Jim Davies propped up and held, but with a great tumbler of brandy and port in his hand.

‘Now, my man,’ said, or rather screamed Bartley, ‘tell him where Hope is and Mary—that I—O God! O God!’

‘Master,’ said Jim, faintly, ‘I was in the hall with Mr. Hope and the lady, when the first explosion came. Most of us ran past the old shaft and got clear. A few were caught by the falling shaft, for I looked back and saw it. But I never saw Master Hope among them. If he was, he is buried under the shaft, but I do really think that he was that taken up with his girl, and that darned villain that fired the mine, as he’s like to be in the hall either alive or dead.’

He could say no more, but fell into a sort of doze, the result of the powerful stimulant on his enfeebled frame and empty stomach. Then Bartley, with trembling hands, brought out a map of the mine and showed Walter where the second party had got to.

‘See,’ said he, ‘they are within twenty feet of the bottom, and the hall is twenty-three feet high. Hope measured it. Give

up working downwards, pick into the sides of that hall, for in that hall I see them at night ; sometimes they are alive, sometimes they are dead, sometimes they are dying. I shall go mad, I shall go mad ! ’

With this he went raging about, giving the wisest orders, with the looks and tones of a madman. In a minute he had a cage ready for Walter, and twenty fresh-lit lamps, and down went Walter with more men and pickaxes. As soon as he got out of the cage, he cried wildly, ‘ Stop that, men, and do as I do.’

He took a sweep with his pick, and delivered a horizontal blow at the clay on that side of the shaft Bartley had told him to attack. His pickaxe, stuck in it, and he extricated it with difficulty.

‘ Nay, master,’ cried a miner who had fallen in love with him, ‘ drive thy pick at t’ coal.’

Walter then observed that above the clay there was a narrow seam of coal ; he heaved

his pick again, but instead of striking it half downwards, as he ought to have done, he delivered a tremendous horizontal blow that made the coal ring like a church bell, and jarred his own stout arms so terribly that the pick fell out of his numbed hand.

Then the man who had advised him saw that he was disabled for a time and stepped into his place.

But in that short interval an accident occurred so strange and thrilling that the stout miners uttered treble cries like women, and then one mighty Hah! burst like a diapason from their manly bosoms.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE THREE DEADLY PERILS.

SEVEN miners were buried under the ruins of the shaft, but although masses of coal and clay fell into the hall from the side nearest to the explosions, and blocked up some of the passages, nobody was crushed to death there; only the smoke was so stifling that it seemed impossible to live.

That smoke was lighter than the air; its thick pall lifted by degrees and revealed three figures.

Grace Hope, by happy instinct, had sunk upon the ground to breathe in that stifling smoke. Hope, who had collared Ben Burnley, had sunk to the ground with him, but still clutched the assassin. These were the three

left alive in the hall, and this was their first struggle for life.

As soon as it was possible to speak, Hope took up his lamp, which had fallen, and, holding it up high, he cried, 'Grace, my child, where are you?' She came to him directly; he took her in his arms, and thanked God for this great preservation.

Then he gave Burnley a kick, and ordered him to the right hand of the hall. 'You'll keep to that side,' he said, 'and think of what you have done; your victims will keep this side, and comfort each other till honest men undo your work, you villain.'

Burnley crouched and wriggled away like a whipped hound, and flung himself down in bitter despair.

'Oh, papa,' said Grace, 'we have escaped a great danger, but shall we ever see the light of day?'

'Of course we shall, child: be sure that great efforts will be made to save us. Miners have their faults, but leaving other men to

perish is not one of them ; there are no greater heroes in the world than those rough fellows, with all their faults. What you and I must do at once is to search for provisions and lamps and tools ; if there are no poisonous gases set free, it is a mere question of time. My poor child has a hard life before her ; but only live—and we shall be rescued.'

These brave words comforted Grace, as they were intended to do, and she accompanied her father down the one passage which was left open after the explosion. Fortunately, this led to a new working, and before he had gone many yards Hope found a lamp that had been dropped by some miner who had rushed into the hall as the first warning came. Hope extinguished the light, and gave it to Grace.

'That will be twenty-four hours' light to us,' said he, 'but, oh, what I want to find is food. There must be some left behind.'

'Papa,' said Grace, 'I think I saw a miner

throw a bag into an empty truck, when the first alarm was given.'

'Back! back! my child!' cried Hope, 'before that villain finds it!'

He did not wait for her but ran back, and he found Ben Burnley in the neighbourhood of that very truck; but Burnley sneaked off at his approach. Hope, looking into the truck, found treasures—a dozen new sacks, a heavy hammer, a small bag of nails, a can of tea, and a bag with a loaf in it, and several broken pieces of bread. He put his lamp out directly, for he had lucifer matches in his pocket, and he hid the bag of bread; then he lighted his lamp again, and fastened it up by a nail in the centre of the hall.

'There,' said he to Burnley, 'that's to light us both equally; when it goes out you must hang up yours in its place.'

'That's fair,' said Burnley humbly.

There were two trucks on Hope's side of the hall—the empty one in question, and one that was full of coal. Both stood about two

yards from Hope's side of the hall. Hope turned the empty truck and brought it parallel to the other; then he nailed two sacks together, and fastened them to the coal truck and the *débris*; then he laid sacks upon the ground for Grace to lie on, and he kept two sacks for himself, and two in reserve, and he took two and threw them to Ben Burnley.

‘I give you two, and I keep two myself,’ said he. ‘But my daughter shall have a room to herself, even here; and if you molest her I’ll brain you with this hammer.’

‘I don’t want to molest her,’ said Burnley. ‘It ain’t my fault she’s here.’

Then there was a gloomy silence, and well there might be. The one lamp, twinkling faintly against the wall, did but make darkness visible, and revealed the horror of this dismal scene. The weary hours began to crawl away, marked only by Hope’s watch, for in this living tomb summer was winter, and day was night.

The horrors of entombment in a mine have,

we think, been described better than any other calamity which befalls living men. Inspired by this subject novelists have gone beyond themselves, journalists have gone beyond themselves; and, without any affectation, we say we do not think we could go through the dismal scene before us in its general details without falling below many gifted contemporaries, and adding bulk without value to their descriptions. The true characteristic feature of *this* sad scene was not, we think, the alternations of hope and despair, nor the gradual sinking of frames exhausted by hunger and thirst, but the circumstance that here an assassin and his victims were involved in one terrible calamity; and as one day succeeded to another, and the hoped-for rescue came not, the hatred of the assassin and his victims was sometimes at odds with the fellowship that sprang out of a joint calamity. About twelve hours after the explosion Burnley detected Hope and his daughter eating, and moistening their lips with the tea, and a spoonful of brandy

that Hope had poured into it out of his flask to keep it from turning sour.

‘What, haven’t you a morsel for me?’ said the ruffian in a piteous voice.

Hope gave a sort of snarl of contempt, but still he flung a crust to him as he would to a dog.

Then, after some slight hesitation, Grace rose quietly and took the smaller can, and filled it with tea, and took it across to him.

‘There,’ said she, ‘and may God forgive you.’

He took it and stared at her.

‘It ain’t my fault that you are here,’ said he. But she put up her hand as much as to say, ‘No idle words.’

Two whole days had now elapsed. The food, though economised, was all gone. Burnley’s lamp was flickering, and utter darkness was about to be added to the horrors which were now beginning to chill the hopes with which these poor souls had entered on their

dire probation. Hope took the alarm, seized the expiring lamp, trimmed it, and carried it down the one passage that was open. This time he did not confine his researches to the part where he could stand upright, but went on his hands and knees down the newest working. At the end of it he gave a shout of triumph, and in a few minutes returned to his daughter, exhausted and blackened all over with coal; but the lamp was now burning brightly in his hand, and round his neck was tied a can of oil.

‘Oh, my poor father,’ said Grace. ‘Is that all you have discovered?’

‘Thank God for it,’ said Hope. ‘You little know what it would be to pass two more days here without light, as well as without food.’

The next day was terrible. The violent pangs of hunger began to gnaw like vultures, and the thirst was still more intolerable; the pangs of hunger intermitted for hours at a time, and then returned to intermit again; they

exhausted but did not infuriate, but the rage of thirst became incessant and maddening. Ben Burnley suffered the most from this, and the wretch came to Hope for consolation.

‘Where’s the sense of biding here?’ said he, ‘to be burned to deeth wi’ drought. Let’s flood the mine and drink or be drooned.’

‘How can I flood the mine?’ said Hope.

‘You know best, maister,’ said the man. ‘Why, how many tons of water did ye draw from yon tank every day?’

‘We conduct about five tons into a pit, and we send about five tons up to the surface daily.’

‘Then how much water will there be in the tank now?’

Hope looked at his watch and said, ‘There was a good deal of water in the tank when you blew up the mine; there must be about thirty tons in it now.’

‘Well, then,’ said Burnley, ‘you that knows everything, help me Brust the wall o’ tank; it’s thin enow.’

Hope reflected.

‘If we let in the whole body of water,’ said he, ‘it would shatter us to pieces, and crush us against the wall of our prison and drown us before it ran away through the obstructed passages into the new workings. Fortunately, we have no pickaxe, and cannot be tempted to self-slaughter.’

This silenced Burnley for the day, and he remained sullenly apart. Still, the idea never left his mind. The next day, towards evening, he asked Hope to light his own lamp, and come and look at the wall of the tank.

‘Not without me,’ whispered Grace. ‘I see him cast looks of hatred at you.’

They went together, and Burnley bade Hope observe that the water was trickling through in places, a drop at a time; it could not penetrate the coaly veins nor the streaks of clay, but it oozed through the porous strata, certain strips of blackish earth in particular; and it trickled down, a drop at a time. Hope looked at this feature with anxiety, for he was

a man of science, and knew by the fate of banked reservoirs, great and small, the strange explosive power of a little water driven through strata by a great body pressing behind it.'

'You'll see, it will brust itsen,' said Burnley exultingly, 'and the sooner the better for me, for I'll never get alive out on t' mine; yow blowed me to the men, and they'll break every bone in my skin.'

Hope did not answer this directly.

'There, don't go to meet trouble, my man,' said he. 'Give me the can, Grace. Now, Burnley, hold this can, and catch every drop till it is full.'

'Why, it will take hauf a day to fill it,' objected Burnley, 'and it will be hauf mud when all is done.'

'I'll filter it,' said Hope. 'You do as you are bid.'

He darted to a part of the mine where he had seen a piece of charred timber; he dragged it in with him, and asked Grace for a pocket handkerchief; she gave him a clean

cambric one ; he took his pocket knife and soon scraped off a little heap of charcoal, and then he sewed the handkerchief into a bag, for the handy man always carried a needle and thread.

Slowly, slowly, the muddy water trickled into the little can, and then, the bag being placed over the larger can, slowly, slowly, the muddy water trickled through Hope's filter, and dropped clear, and drinkable, into the larger can. In that dead life of theirs, with no incidents but torments and terrors, the hours passed swiftly in this experiment. Hope sat upon a great lump of coal ; his daughter kneeled in front of him, gazing at him with love, confidence, reverence ; and Burnley kneeled in front of him too, but at a greater distance, with wolfish eyes full of thirst and nothing else.

At last the little can was two-thirds full of clear water. Hope took the large iron spoon which he had found along with the tea, and gave a full spoonful to his daughter. 'My

child,' said he, 'let it trickle very slowly over your tongue and down your throat; it is the throat and the adjacent organs which suffer most from thirst.' He then took a spoonful himself, not to drink after an assassin. He then gave a spoonful to Burnley with the same instructions, and rose from his seat and gave the can to Grace, and said, 'The rest of this pittance must not be touched for six hours at least.'

Burnley, instead of complying with the wise advice given him, tossed the liquid down his throat with a gesture, and then, dashing down the spoon, said, 'I'll have the rest on't, if I die for it,' and made a furious rush at Grace Hope.

She screamed faintly, and Hope met him full in that incautious rush, and felled him like a log with a single blow. Burnley lay there with his heels tapping the ground for a little while; then he got on his hands and knees, and crawled away to the farthest corner of his own place, and sat brooding.

That night, when Grace retired to rest, Hope lay down at her feet with his hammer in his hand, and when one slept the other watched, for they feared an attack. Towards the morning of the next day Grace's quick senses heard a mysterious noise in Burnley's quarter; she woke her father. Directly he went to the place, and he found Burnley at work on his knees tearing away with his hands and nails at the ruins of the shaft. Apparently fury supplied the place of strength; for he had raised quite a large heap behind him, and he had laid bare the feet up to the knees of a dead miner. Hope reported this in a hushed voice to Grace, and said solemnly, 'Poor wretch, he's going mad, I fear.'

'Oh, no,' said Grace, 'that would be too horrible. Whatever should we do?'

'Keep him to his own side, that is all,' said Hope.

'But,' objected Grace in dismay, 'if he is mad he won't listen, and he will come here and attack me.'

‘ If he does,’ said Hope simply, ‘ I must kill him, that’s all.’

Burnley, however, in point of fact, kept more and more aloof for many hours ; he never left his work till he laid bare the whole body of that miner, and found a pickaxe in his dead hand. This he hid, and reserved it for deadly uses ; he was not clear in his mind whether to brain Hope with it, and so be revenged on him for having shut him up in that mine, or whether to peck a hole in the tank and destroy all three by a quicker death than thirst or starvation. The savage had another and more horrible reason for keeping out of sight ; maddened by thirst, he had recourse to that last extremity better men have been driven to : he made a cut with his clasp-knife in the breast of the dead miner, and tried to swallow jellied blood.

This horrible relief never lasts long, and the penalty follows in a few hours, but in the meantime the savage obtained relief, and even vigour, from this ghastly source ; and

seeing Hope and his daughter lying comparatively weak and exhausted, he came and sat down at a little distance in front of them ; that was partly done to divert Hope from examining his shambles and his unnatural work.

‘Maister,’ said he, ‘how long have we been here?’

‘Six days and more,’ said Hope.

‘Six days, said Grace faintly, for her powers were now quite exhausted ; ‘and no signs of help, no hope of rescue !’

‘Do not say so, Grace. Rescue in time is certain, and therefore while we live there is hope.’

‘Ay,’ said Burnley, ‘for you tew, but not for me. You telt the men that I fired t’ mine, and if one of those men gets free, they’ll all tear me limb from jacket. Why should I leave one grave to walk into another? But for yow I should have been away six days ago.’

‘Man,’ said Hope, ‘cannot you see that my hand was but the instrument ; it was the hand of Heaven that kept you back. Cease to blame your victims, and begin to see things as

they are and to repent. Even if you escape, could the white faces ever fade from your sight, or the dying shrieks ever leave your ear, of the brave men you so foully murdered? Repent, monster, repent !’

Burnley was not touched, but he was scared by Hope’s solemnity, and went to his own corner muttering, and as he crouched there there came over his dull brain, what in due course follows the horrible meal he had made—a feverish frenzy.

In the meantime Grace, who had been lying half-insensible, raised her head slowly, and said in a low voice, ‘Water, water !’

‘Oh, my girl,’ said Hope in despair, ‘I’ll go and get enough to moisten your lips, but the last scrap of food has gone—the last drop of oil is burning away, and in an hour we shall be in darkness and despair.’

‘No, no, father,’ said Grace, ‘not whilst there is water there, beautiful water.’

‘But you cannot drink *that* unfiltered ; it is foul, it is poisonous.’

‘Not that, papa,’ said Grace, ‘far beyond that—look! See that clear river sparkling in the sunlight; how bright and beautiful it shines! Look at the waving trees upon the other side, the green meadows and the bright blue sky, and there—there—there are the great white swans. No—no. I forgot; they are not swans, they are ships sailing to the bright land you told me of, where there is no suffering and no sorrow.’

Then Hope, to his horror, began to see that this must be the very hallucination of which he had read—a sweet illusion of green fields and crystal water, which often precedes actual death by thirst and starvation. He trembled; he prayed secretly to God to spare her, and not to kill his new-found child, his darling, in his arms.

By-and-by Grace spoke again, but this time her senses were clear. ‘How dark it’s grown,’ she said. ‘Ah, we are back again in that awful mine.’ Then, with the patient fortitude of a woman when once she thinks the will of the Almighty is declared, she laid her hand upon

his shoulder, and she said soothingly, 'Dear father, bow to Heaven's will.' Then she held up both her feeble arms to him: 'Kiss me, father, FOR WE ARE TO DIE.'

With these firm and patient words she laid her sweet head upon the ground, and hoped and feared no more.

But the man could not bow like the woman. He kissed her as she bade him, and laid her gently down; but after that he sprang wildly to his feet in a frenzy, and raged aloud, as his daughter could no longer hear him: 'No, no!' he cried, 'this thing cannot be; they have had seven days to get to us!'

'Ah, but there are mountains and rocks of earth and coal piled up between us. We are buried alive in the bowels of the earth.'

'Well, and shouldn't I have blasted a hundred rocks and picked through mountains, to save a hundred lives, or to save one such life as this, no matter whose child she was?'

'Ah! you poor scum, you came to me

whenever you wanted me, and you never came in vain. But now that I want you, you smoke your pipes, and walk calmly over this living tomb I lie in !’

‘ Well, call yourselves men, and let your friends perish ! I am a man and I can die !’

Then he threw himself wildly on his knees over his insensible daughter :

‘ But, my child ! O God ! look down upon my child ! Do, pray, see the horror of it—the horror and the hellish injustice ! She has but just found her father. She is just beginning life ; it’s not her time to die ! Why, you know, she only came here to save her father. Heaven’s blessing is the right of pious children ; it’s promised in God’s Word. They are to live long upon earth—not to be cut off like criminals.’

Then he rose wildly, and raged about the place, flinging his arms on high, so that even Burnley, though his own reason was shaken, cowered away from the fury of a stronger mind.

‘ Men and angels cry out against it !’ he

screamed, in madness and despair. ‘Can this thing be? Can Heaven and earth look calmly on and see this horror? Are men all ingratitude? Is GOD ALL APATHY?’

A blow like a hammer striking a church bell tinkled outside the wall, and seemed to come from a great distance.

To him who, like the rugged Elijah, had expostulated so boldly with his Maker, and his Maker, who is not to be irritated, forgave him, that blow seemed at first to ring from Heaven. He stood still, and trembled like a leaf; he listened; the sound was not repeated.

‘Ah,’ said he, ‘it was an illusion like hers.’

But for all that he seized his hammer, and darted to the back of the hall, and, mounting on a huge fragment of coal, struck the seam high above his head. He gave two blows at longish intervals, and then three blows in quick succession.

Grace heard, and began to raise herself on her hands in wonder.

Outside the wall came two leisurely blows that seemed a mile off, though they were not ten feet, and then three blows in quick succession.

‘My signal echoed,’ yelled Hope. ‘Do you hear, child, my signal answered? Thank God! thank God! thank God!’

He fell on his knees and cried like a child. The next minute, burning with hope and joy, he was by Grace’s side with his arms round her.

‘You can’t give way now. Fight on a few minutes more. Death, I defy you; I am a father; I tear my child from your clutches.’ With this he raised her in his arms with surprising vigour. It was Grace’s turn to shake off all weakness, under the great excitement of the brain.

‘Yes, I’ll live,’ she cried, ‘I’ll live for you! Oh, the gallant men! hear, hear the pickaxes at work! An army is coming to our rescue, father; the God you doubted sends them, and some hero leads them.’

The words had scarcely left her lips when Hope set her down in fresh alarm. An enemy's pickaxe was at work to destroy them ; Burnley was picking furiously at the weak part of the tank, shrieking, ' They will tear me to pieces ; there is no hope in this world nor the next for me.'

' Madman !' cried Hope, ' he'll let the water in before they can save us.' He rushed at Burnley and seized him, but his frenzy was gone, and Burnley was upon him ; after a short struggle Burnley flung him off with prodigious power. Hope flew at him again, but incautiously, and the savage, lowering his head, drove it with such fury into Hope's chest that he sent him to a distance, and laid him flat on his back, utterly breathless. Grace flew to him, and raised him.

He was not a man to lose his wits. ' To the truck,' he gasped, ' or we are lost !'

' I'll flood the mine ! I'll flood the mine !' yelled Burnley.

Hope made his daughter mount a large

fragment of coal we have already mentioned, and from that she sprang to the truck, and with her excitement and with her athletic power she raised herself into the full truck, and even helped her father in after her. But just as she got him on to the truck, and whilst he was still only on his knees, that section of the wall we have called the tank rent and gaped under Burnley's pickaxe, and presently exploded about six feet from the ground, and a huge volume of water drove masses of earth and coal before it, and came roaring like a solid body straight at the coal truck, and drove it against the opposite wall, smashed the nearest side in, and would have thrown Grace off it like a feather, but Hope, kneeling and clinging to the side, held her like a vice.

Grace screamed violently. Immediately there was a roar of exultation outside from the hitherto silent workers; for that scream told that the *woman* was alive too—the wife of the brave fellow who had won all their hearts, and melted away the icy barrier of class.

Three gigantic waves struck the truck and made it quiver.

The first came half way up ; the second came full two-thirds ; the third dashed the senseless body of Ben Burnley, with bleeding head and broken bones, against the very edge of the truck, then surged back with him into a whirling vortex.

Grace screamed continuously ; she gave herself up now for lost, and the louder she screamed the louder and the nearer the saving party shouted and hurrahed.

‘No, do not fear,’ cried Hope ; ‘you shall not die. Love is stronger than death.’

The words were scarce out of his mouth when the point of a steel pick came clean through the stuff, another followed above it, then another, then another, and then another. Holes were made, then gaps, then larger gaps ; then a mass of coal fell in—furious picks—a portion of the mine knocked away—and there stood in a red blaze of lamps held up the gallant band, roaring, shouting, working, led by a

stalwart giant with bare arms, begrimed and bleeding, face smoked, hair and eyebrows black with coal dust, and eyes flaming like red coals. He sprang with one fearless bound down to the coal truck, and caught up his wife in his arms, and held her to his panting bosom. Ropes, ladder—everything—and they were saved ; whilst the corpse of the assassin whirled round and round in the subsiding eddies of the black water, and, as that water ran away into the mine, lay coated with mud at the feet of those who had saved his innocent victims.

CHAPTER XXIV.

STRANGE COMPLICATIONS.

EXERT all the powers of your mind, and conceive, if you can, what that mother felt whose only son sickened, and, after racking her heart with hopes and fears, died before her eyes, and was placed in his coffin and carried to his rest. Yet One in the likeness of a man bade the bearers stand still, then with a touch made the coffin open, the dead come back, blooming with youth and health, and handed him to his mother.

That picture no mortal mind can realise ; but the effort will take you so far as this—you may imagine what Walter Clifford felt when, almost at the climax of despair, he received from that living tomb the good and beautiful

creature who was the light of his eyes and the darling of his heart.

How he gloated on her! How he murmured words of comfort and joy over her as the cage carried her and Hope and him up again into the blessed sunshine! And, there, what a burst of exultation and honest rapture received them!

Everybody was there. The news of Hope's signal had been wired to the surface. An old, original telegraph had been set up by Colonel Clifford, and its arms set flying to tell him. That old campaigner was there with his spring break and mattrasses and an able physician. Bartley was there, pale and old, and trembling and crying. He fell on his knees before Hope and Grace. She drew back from him with repulsion; but he cried out 'No matter! no matter! They are saved! they are saved!'

Walter carried her to his father and left Bartley kneeling. Then he dashed back for Hope, who did not move, and found him on his knees insensible. A piece of coal, driven

by one of the men's picks, had struck him on the temple. The gallant fellow had tried to hide his hurt with his handkerchief, but the handkerchief was soaked with blood, and the man, exhausted by hunger, violent emotions, and this last blow, felt neither his trouble nor his joy. He was lifted with tender pity into the brake and the blood stanchied, and stimulants applied by the doctor. But Grace would have his head on her bosom and her hand in Walter's. Fortunately, the doctor was no other than that physician who had attended Colonel Clifford in his dangerous attack of internal gout. We say fortunately, for patients who have endured extremities of hunger have to be treated with very great skill and caution. Gentle stimulants and mucilages must precede solid food, and but a little of anything be taken at a time. Doctor Garner began his treatment in the very brake. The first spoonful of egg and brandy told upon Grace Hope. Her deportment had been strange. She had seemed confused at times, and now and then she would

cast a look of infinite tenderness upon Walter, and then again she would knit her brow and seem utterly puzzled.

But now she gave Walter a look that brought him nearer to her, and she said with a heavenly smile, ‘You love me best—better than the other.’ Then she began to cry over her father.

‘Better than the other,’ said Walter aloud. ‘What other?’

‘Be quiet,’ said the doctor. ‘Do you really think her stomach can be empty for six days and her head be none the worse. Come, my dear, another spoonful. Good girl! Now let me look at you, Mr. Walter.’

‘Why, what is the matter with *him*?’ said the Colonel. ‘I never saw him look better in all my life.’

‘Indeed! Red spots on his cheek bones, ditto on his temples, and his eyes glaring.’

‘Excitement and happiness,’ said Walter.

The doctor took no notice of him. ‘He has been outraging Nature,’ said he, ‘and

she will have her revenge. We are not out of the wood yet, Colonel Clifford, and you had better put them all three under my command.'

'I do, my good friend, I do,' said Colonel Clifford eagerly. 'It is your department, and I don't believe in two commanders.'

They drew up at the great door of Clifford Hall. It seemed to open of itself, and there were all the servants drawn up in two lines.

They all showed eager sympathy, but only John Baker and Mrs. Milton ventured to express it. 'God bless you all!' said Colonel Clifford. 'But it is our turn now. They are all in the doctor's hands. My whole household, obey him to the letter. It is my order. Dr. Garner, this is Mrs. Milton, my housekeeper. You will find her a good lieutenant.'

'Mrs. Milton,' said the doctor sharply, 'warm baths in three rooms, and to bed with this lot. Carry Mr. Hope up; he is my first patient. Bring me eggs, milk, brandy, new port wine. Cook!'

'Sir?'

‘ Hammer three chickens to pieces with your rolling pin, and then mince them ; then chuck them into a big pot with cold water, stew them an hour, and then boil them to a jelly, strain, and serve. Meantime, send up three slices of mutton, half raw ; we will do a little chewing, not much.’

The patients submitted like lambs ; only Walter grumbled a little, but at last confessed to a headache and sudden weariness.

Julia Clifford took special charge of Grace Hope, the doctor of William Hope, and Colonel Clifford sat by Walter, congratulating, soothing, and encouraging him, until he began to doze.

Doctor Garner’s estimate of his patients proved correct. The next day Walter was in a raging fever.

Hope remained in a pitiable state of weakness, and Grace, who in theory was the weaker vessel, began to assist Julia in nursing them both. To be sure, she was all whipcord and

steel beneath her delicate skin, and had always been active and temperate. And then she was much the youngest, and the constitutions of such women are anything but weak. Still it was a most elastic recovery from a great shock.

But the more her body recovered its strength and her brain its clearness, the more was her mind agitated and distressed.

Her first horrible anxiety was for Walter's life. The doctor showed no fear, but that might be his way.

It was a raging fever, with all the varieties that make fever terrible to behold. He was never left without two attendants; and as Hope was in no danger now, though pitiably weak and slowly convalescent, Grace was often one of Walter's nurses. So was Julia Clifford. He sometimes recognised them for a little while, and filled their loving hearts with hope. But the next moment he was off into the world of illusions, and sometimes could not see them. Often he asked for Grace most

piteously, when she was looking at him through her tears and trying hard to win him to her with her voice. On these occasions he always called her Mary. One unlucky day that Grace and Julia were his only attendants, he became very restless and wild, said he had committed a great crime, and the scaffold was being prepared for him. 'Hark!' said he, 'don't you hear the workmen? Curse their hammers!—their eternal tip-tapping goes through my brain. The scaffold! What would the old man say? A Clifford hung! Never! I'll save him and myself from that.'

Then he sprang out of bed and made a rush at the window. It was open, unluckily, and he had actually got his knee through when Grace darted to him and seized him, screaming to Julia to help her. Julia did her best—especially in the way of screaming. Grace's muscle and resolution impeded the attempt no more; slowly, gradually, he got both knees upon the window-sill. But the delay was everything. In came a professional nurse. She flung her arms

round Walter's waist, and just hung back with all her weight. As she was heavy, though not corpulent, his more active strength became quite valueless; weight and position defeated him hopelessly, and at last he sank exhausted into the nurse's arms, and she and Grace carried him to bed like a child.

Of course, when it was all over, half-a-dozen people came to the rescue. The woman told what had happened; the doctor administered a soothing draught; the patient became very quiet, then perspired a little, then went to sleep; and the cheerful doctor declared that he would be all the better for what he called this little outbreak. But Grace sat there quivering for hours, and Colonel Clifford installed two new nurses that very evening. They were pensioners of his—soldiers who had been invalided from wounds, but had long recovered, and were neither of them much above forty. They had some experience, and proved admirable nurses—quiet—silent—vigilant as sentinels.

That burst of delirium was the climax. Walter began to get better after that. But a long period of convalescence was before him; and the doctor warned them that convalescence has its very serious dangers, and that they must be very careful, and above all not irritate nor even excite him.

All this time torments of another kind had been overpowered, but never suppressed, in poor Grace's mind; and these now became greater as Walter's danger became less and less.

What would be the end of all this? Here she was installed, to her amazement, in Clifford Hall as Walter's wife, and treated, all of a sudden, with marked affection and respect by Colonel Clifford, who had hitherto seemed to abhor her. But it was all an illusion—the whole house of cards must come tumbling down some day.

Some days before the event last described Hope had said to her:

‘My child, this is no place for you and me.’

‘No more it is, papa,’ said Grace. ‘I know that too well.’

‘Then why did you let them bring us here?’

‘Papa,’ said Grace, ‘I forgot all about *that*.’

‘Forgot it!’

‘It seems incredible, does it not? But what I saw and felt thrust what I had only heard out of my mind. Oh, papa! you were insensible, poor dear; but if you had only seen Walter Clifford when he saved us! I took him for some giant miner. He seemed ever so much bigger than the gentleman I loved—ay, and I shall love him to my dying day, whether or not he has—— But when he sprang to my side, and took me with his bare, bleeding arms to his heart, that panted so, I thought his heart would burst, and mine, too, could I feel another woman between us? All that might be true, but it was unreal. That he loved me, and had saved me, *that* was real. And when we sat together in the carriage, your poor bleeding head upon my bosom, and his hand grasping mine, and his sweet eyes beaming

with love and joy, what could I realise, except my father's danger and my husband's mighty love? I was all present anxiety and present bliss. His sin and my alarms seemed hundreds of miles off, and doubtful. And even since I have been here, see how greater and nearer things have overpowered me. Your deadly weakness—you who were strong, poor dear—oh, let me kiss you, dear darling!—till you had saved your child—Walter's terrible danger! Oh, my dear father, spare me! How can a poor, weak woman think of such different woes, and realise and suffer them all at once? Spare me, dear father, spare me! Let me see you stronger; let me see *him* safe; and then let us think of that other cruel thing, and what we ought to say to Colonel Clifford, and what we ought to do, and where we are to go.'

'My poor child,' said Hope, faintly, with tears in his eyes, 'I say no more. Take your own time.'

Grace did not abuse this respite. So soon as the doctor declared Walter out of immediate

danger, and indeed safe, if cautiously treated, she returned of her own accord to the miserable subject that had been thrust aside.

After some discussion, they both agreed that they must now confide their grief to Colonel Clifford, and must quit his home, and make him master of the situation and sole depository of the terrible secret for a time.

Hope wished to make the revelation, and spare his daughter that pain. She assented readily and thankfully.

This was a woman's first impulse—to put a man forward.

But by-and-by she had one of her fits of hard thinking, and saw that such a revelation ought not to be made by one straightforward man to another, but with all a woman's soothing ways. Besides, she had already discovered that the Colonel had a great esteem and growing affection for her; and, in short, she felt that if the blow could be softened by anybody, it was by her.

Her father objected that she would en-

counter a terrible trial, from which he could save her ; but she entreated him, and he yielded to her entreaty, though against his judgment.

When this was settled, nothing remained but to execute it.

Then the woman came uppermost, and Grace procrastinated for one insufficient reason and another.

However, at last she resolved that the very next day she would ask John Baker to get her a private interview with Colonel Clifford in his study.

This resolution had not been long formed, when that very John Baker tapped at Mr. Hope's door, and brought her a note from Colonel Clifford, asking her if she could favour him with a visit in his study.

Grace said, ' Yes, Mr. Baker, I will come directly.'

As soon as Baker was gone she began to bemoan her weak procrastination, and begged her father's pardon for her presumption in taking the matter out of his hands. ' You

would not have put it off a day. Now, see what I have done by my cowardice.'

Hope did not see what she had done, and the quick-witted young lady, jumping at once at a conclusion, opened her eyes and said :

'Why, don't you see? Some other person has told him what it was so important he should hear first from me. Ah! it is the same gentleman that came and warned me. He has heard that we are actually married; for it is the talk of the place, and he told me she would punish him if he neglected her warning. Oh, what shall I do?'

'You go too fast, Grace, dear. Don't run before trouble like that. Come, go to Colonel Clifford, and you will find it is nothing of the kind.'

Grace shook her head grandly. Experience had given her faith in her own instincts, as people call them, though they are subtle reasonings, the steps of which are not put forward; and she went down to the study.

‘Grace, my dear,’ said the Colonel, ‘I think I shall have a fit of the gout.’

‘Oh! no,’ said Grace. ‘We have trouble enough.’

‘It gets less every day, my dear; that is one comfort. But what I meant was that our poor invalids eclipse me entirely in your good graces. That is because you are a true woman, and an honour to your sex. But I should like to see a little more of you. Well, all in good time. I didn’t send for you to tell you that. Sit down, my girl; it is a matter of business’

Grace sat down, keenly on her guard, though she did not show it in the least. Colonel Clifford resumed:

‘You may be sure that nothing has been near my heart for some time but your danger and my dear son’s. Still, I owe something to other sufferers, and the poor widows whose husbands have perished in that mine have cried to me for vengeance on the person who bribed that Burnley. I am a magistrate, too, and duty

must never be neglected. I have got detectives about, and I have offered five hundred guineas reward for the discovery of the villain. One Jim Davies described him to me, and I put the description on the placard and in the papers. But now I learn that Davies's description is all second hand. He had it from you. Now, I must tell you that a description at second hand always misses some part or other. As a magistrate, I never encourage Jack to tell me what Jill says when I can get hold of Jill. You are Jill, my dear, so now please verify Jack's description or correct it. However, the best way will be to give me your own description before I read you his.'

'I will,' said Grace, very much relieved. 'Well, then, he was a man not over forty; thin, and with bony fingers; an enormous gold ring on the little finger of his right hand. He wore a suit of tweed, all one colour, rather tight, and a vulgar neck handkerchief almost crimson. He had a face like a corpse, and very thin lips. But the most remarkable things

were his eyes and his eyebrows. His eyes were never still, and his brows were very black and not shaped like other people's; they were neither straight, like Julia Clifford's, for instance, nor arched like Walter's—that is to say, they were arched, but all on one side. Each brow began quite high up on the temple, and then came down in a slanting drop to the bridge of the nose, and lower than the bridge. There, if you will give me a pencil, I will draw you one of his eyebrows in a minute.'

She drew the eyebrow with masterly ease and rapidity.

'Why, that is the eyebrow of Mephistopheles.'

'And so it is,' said Grace naïvely. 'No wonder it did not seem human to me.'

'I am sorry to say it is human. You can see it in every convict gaol. But,' said he, 'how came this villain to sit to you for his portrait?'

'He did not, sir. But when he was struggling with me to keep me from rescuing my father——'

‘What! did the ruffian lay hands on you?’

‘That he did, and so did Mr. Bartley. But the villain was the leader of it all; and whilst he was struggling with me——’

‘You were taking stock of him? Well, they talk of a Jew’s eye; give me a woman’s. My dear, the second-hand description is not worth a button. I must write fresh notices from yours, and above all instruct the detectives. You have given me information that will lead to that man’s capture. As for the gold ring and the tweed suit, they disappeared into space when my placard went up, you may be sure of that, and a felon can paint his face. But his eyes and eyebrows will do him. They are the mark of a gaol-bird. I am a visiting justice, and have often noticed the peculiarity. Draw me his eyebrows, and we will photograph them in Derby, and my detectives shall send copies to Scotland Yard and all the convict prisons. We’ll have him.’

The Colonel paused suddenly in his trium-

phant prediction, and said, 'But what was that you let fall about Bartley? He was no party to this foul crime. Why, he has worked night and day to save you and Hope. Indeed, you both owe your lives to him.'

'Indeed?'

'Yes. He set the men on to save you within ten minutes of the explosion. He bought rope by the mile, and great iron buckets to carry up the *débris* that was heaped up between you and the working party. He raved about the pit day and night lamenting his daughter and his friend, and why I say he saved you, 'twas he who advised Walter. I had this from Walter himself before his fever came on. He advised and implored him not to attempt to clear the whole shaft, but to pick sideways into the mine twenty feet from the ground. He told Walter that he never really slept at night, and in his dreams saw you in a part of the mine he calls the hall. Now, Walter says that but for this advice they would have been two days more getting to you.'

‘We should have been dead,’ said Grace gravely. Then she reflected.

‘Colonel Clifford,’ said she, ‘I listened to that villain and Mr. Bartley planning my father’s destruction. Certainly, every word Mr. Bartley *said* was against it. He spoke of it with horror. Yet somehow or other that wretched man obtained from him an order to send the man Burnley down the mine, and what will you think when I tell you that he assisted the villain to hinder me from going to the mine?’ Then she told him the whole scene, and how they shut her up in the house, and she had to go down a curtain and burst through a quick-set hedge. But all the time she was thinking of Walter’s bigamy and how she was to reveal it; and she related her exploits in such a cold, languid manner, that it was hardly possible to believe them.

Colonel Clifford could not help saying, ‘My dear, you have had a great shock, and you have dreamt all this. Certainly you are a fine girl, and broad-shouldered. I admire that in

man or woman ; but you are so delicate, so refined, so gentle.'

Grace blushed and said languidly, 'For all that, I am an athlete.'

'An athlete, child !'

'Yes, sir. Mr. Bartley took care of that. He would never let me wear a corset, and for years he would make me do calisthenics under a master.'

'Calisthenics?'

'That is a fine word for gymnastics.' Then, with a double dose of langour, 'I can go up a loose rope forty feet, so it was nothing to me to come down one. The hedge was the worst thing ; but my father was in danger and my blood was up.' She turned suddenly on the Colonel with a flash of animation : 'You used to keep racehorses, Walter told me.' The Colonel stared at this sudden turn.

'That I did,' said he, 'and a pretty penny they cost me.'

'Well, sir, is not a racehorse a poor mincing thing until her blood gets up galloping?'

‘By Jove! you are right,’ said he, ‘she steps like a cat upon hot bricks. But the comparison is not needed. Whatever statement Mrs. Walter Clifford makes to me seriously is gospel to me, who already know enough of her to respect her lightest word. Pray grant me this much, that Bartley is a true penitent, for I have proof of it in this drawer. I’ll show it you.’

‘No, no, please not,’ said Grace, in no little agitation. ‘Let me take your word for that, as you have taken mine. Oh, sir, he is nothing to me compared with what I thought you wished to say to me. But it is I who must find the courage to say things that would wound you and me still more. Colonel Clifford, pray do not be angry with me till you know all, but indeed your house is not the place for my father or for me.’

‘Why not, madam,’ said the Colonel stiffly, ‘since you are my daughter-in-law?’

She did not reply.

‘Ah!’ said he, colouring high and rising

from his chair. He began to walk the room in some agitation. 'You are right,' said he; 'I once affronted you cruelly, unpardonably. Still, pray consider that you passed for Bartley's daughter; that was my objection to you, and then I did not know your character. But when I saw you come out, pale and resolved to sacrifice yourself to justice and another woman, that converted me at once. Ask Julia what I said about you.'

'I must interrupt you,' said Grace. 'I cannot let such a man as you excuse yourself to a girl of nineteen, who has nothing but reverence for you, and would love you if she dared.'

'Then all I can say is that you are very mysterious, my dear, and I wish you would speak out.'

'I shall speak out soon enough,' said Grace solemnly, 'now I have begun. Colonel Clifford, you have nothing to reproach yourself with. No more have I for that matter. Yet we must both suffer.' She hesitated a moment,

and then said firmly, 'You do me the honour to approve my conduct in that dreadful situation. Did you hear all that passed?—did you take notice of all I said?'

'I did,' said Colonel Clifford. 'I shall never forget that scene, nor the distress nor the fortitude of her I am proud to call my daughter.'

Grace put her hands before her face at these kind words, and he saw the tears trickle between her white fingers. He began to wonder and to feel uneasy. But the brave girl shook off her tears, and manned herself, if we may use such an expression.

'Then, sir,' said she, slowly and emphatically, though quietly, 'did you not think it strange that I should say to my father, "I don't know?"' He asked me before you all, "Are you a wife?"' Twice I said to my father—to him I thought was my father—"I don't know." Can you account for that, sir?'

The Colonel replied, 'I was so unable to account for it that I took Julia Clifford's

opinion on it directly, as we were going home.'

'And what did she say?'

'Oh, she said it was plain enough. The fellow had forbidden you to own the marriage, and you were an obedient wife; and, like women in general, strong against other people, but weak against one.'

'So that is a woman's reading of a woman,' said Grace. 'She will sacrifice her honour and her father's respect, and court the world's contempt and sully herself for life to suit the convenience of a husband for a few hours. My love is great, but it is not slavish nor silly. Do you think, sir, that I doubted for one moment Walter Clifford would own me when he came home and heard what I had suffered? Did I think him so unworthy of my love as to leave me under that stigma? Hardly. Then why should I blacken Mrs. Walter Clifford for an afternoon, just to be unblackened at night?'

'This is good sense,' said the Colonel, 'and the thing is a mystery. Can you solve it?'

‘ You may be sure I can, and—woe is me—I must.’

She hung her head, and her hands worked convulsively.

‘ Sir,’ said she, after a pause, ‘ suppose I could not tell the truth to all those people without subjecting the man I loved—and I love him now dearer than ever—to a terrible punishment for a mere folly done years ago, which now has become something much worse than folly ; but how ? Through his unhappy love for me ? ’

‘ These are dark words,’ said the Colonel. ‘ How am I to understand them ? ’

‘ Dark as they are,’ said Grace, ‘ do they not explain my conduct in that bitter trial better than Julia Clifford’s guesses do—better than anything that has occurred since ? ’

‘ Mrs. Walter Clifford,’ said the Colonel with a certain awe, ‘ I see there is something very grave here, and that it affects my son. I begin to know you. You waited till he was out of danger ; but now you do me the honour

to confide something to me which the world will not drag out of you. So be it. I am a man and a soldier. I have faced cavalry, and I can face the truth. What is it?’

‘Colonel Clifford,’ said Grace, trembling like a leaf, ‘the truth will cut you to the heart, and will most likely kill me. Now that I have gone so far, you may well say, “Tell it me;” but the words, once passed my lips, can never be recalled. Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?’

The struggle overpowered her, and almost for the first time in her life she turned half faint and yet hysterical, and such was her condition that the brave Colonel was downright alarmed and rang hastily for his people. He committed her to the charge of Mrs. Milton. It seemed cruel to demand any further explanation from her just then; so brave a girl, who had gone so far with him, would be sure to tell him sooner or later. Meantime, he sat sombre and agitated, oppressed by a strange sense of awe and mystery and vague misgiving.

Whilst he brooded thus, a footman brought him in a card upon a salver : ‘ The Reverend Alleyn Meredith.’ ‘ Do I know this gentleman ? ’ said the Colonel.

‘ I think not, sir,’ said the footman.

‘ What is he like ? ’

‘ Like a beneficed clergyman, sir.’

Colonel Clifford was not in the humour for company ; but it was not his habit to say, ‘ Not at home,’ when he was at home ; and, being a magistrate, he never knew, when a stranger sent in his card, that it might not be his duty to see him ; so he told the footman to say, ‘ that he was in point of fact engaged, but was at this gentleman’s service for a few minutes.’

The footman retired and promptly ushered in a clergyman, who seemed the model of an archdeacon or a wealthy rector. Sleek and plump without corpulence, neat boots, clothes black and glossy, waistcoat up to the throat, neat black gloves, a snowy tie, a face shaven like an egg, hair and eyebrows grizzled, cheeks rubicund, but not empurpled, as one who drank

only his pint of port, but drank it seven days in the week.

Nevertheless, between you and us, this sleek, rosy personage, archdeacon or rural dean down to the ground, was Leonard Monckton padded to the nine, and tinted as artistically as any canvas in the world.

The first visit Monckton had paid to this neighbourhood was to the mine. He knew that was a dangerous visit, so he came at night, as a decrepit old man. He very soon saw two things which discouraged further visits. One was a placard, describing his crime in a few words, and also his person and clothes, and offering 500 guineas reward. As his pallor was specified, he retired for a minute behind a tent, and emerged the colour of mahogany; he then pursued his observations, and in due course fell in with the second warning. This was the body of a man lying upon the slack at the pit mouth. The slack, not having been added to for many days, was

glowing very hot, and fired during the night. The body he recognised immediately, for the white face stared at him ; it was Ben Burnley undergoing cremation. To this the vindictive miners had condemned him ; they had sat on his body, and passed a resolution, and sworn he should not have Christian burial, so they managed to hide his corpse till the slack got low, and then they brought him up at night and chucked him like a dog on to the smouldering coal ; one-half of him was charred away when Monckton found him, but his face was yet untouched. Two sturdy miners walked to and fro as sentinels, armed with hammers, and firmly resolved that neither law nor gospel should interfere with this horrible example.

Even Monckton, the man of iron nerves, started back with a cry of dismay at the sight and the smell.

One of the miners broke into a hoarse, uneasy laugh. ‘Yow needn’t to skirl, old man,’ he cried. ‘Yon’s not a man ; he’s nobbut a murderer. He’s fired t’ mine, and

made widows and orphans by t' score.' 'Ay,' said the other, 'but there's a worse villain behoid, that found t' brass for t' job and tempted this one. We'll catch him yet; ah, then, we'll not trouble judge nor jury, nor hangman neether.'

'The wretches!' said Monckton. 'What! fire a mine! No punishment is enough for them.' With this sentiment he retired, and never went near the mine again. He wired for a pal of his, and established him at the Dun Cow. These two were in constant communication. Monckton's friend was a very clever gossip, and knew how to question without seeming curious, and the gossiping landlady helped him. So between them Monckton heard that Walter was down with a fever, and not expected to live, and that Hope was confined to his bed and believed to be sinking. Encouraged by this state of things, Monckton made many artful preparations, and resolved to levy a contribution upon Colonel Clifford.

At this period of his manœuvres, Fortune

certainly befriended him wonderfully ; he found Colonel Clifford alone, and likely to be alone ; and at the same time prepared by Grace Clifford's half revelation and violent agitation to believe the artful tale this villain came to tell him.

CHAPTER XXV.

RETRIBUTION.

MONCKTON, during his long imprisonment at Dartmoor, came under many chaplains, and he was popular with them all ; because, when they inquired into the state of his soul, he represented it as humble, penitent, and purified. Two of these gentlemen were High Church, and he noticed their peculiarities : one was a certain half-musical monotony in speaking, which might be called by a severe critic sing-song. Perhaps they thought the intoning of the service in a cathedral could be transferred with advantage to conversation.

So now, to be strictly in character, this personage not only dressed High Church, but threw a sweet musical monotony into the communication he made to Colonel Clifford.

And if the reader will compare this, his method of speaking, with the matter of his discourse, he will be sensible of a singular contrast.

After the first introduction, Monckton intoned very gently that he had a communication to make on the part of a lady, which was painful to him, and would be painful to Colonel Clifford; but, at all events, it was confidential, and, if the Colonel thought proper, would go no farther.

‘I think, sir, you have a son whose name is Walter?’

‘I have a son, and his name is Walter,’ said the Colonel stiffly.

‘I think, sir,’ said musical Monckton, ‘that he left your house about fourteen years ago, and you lost sight of him for a time?’

‘That is so, sir.’

‘He entered the service of a Mr. Robert Bartley as a merchant’s clerk.’

‘I doubt that, sir.’

‘I fear, sir,’ sighed Monckton musically,

‘that is not the only thing he did which has been withheld from you. He married a lady called Lucy Monckton.’

‘Who told you that?’ cried the Colonel.
‘It’s a lie.’

‘I am afraid not,’ said the meek and tune-ful ecclesiastic. ‘I am acquainted with the lady, a most respectable person, and she has shown me the certificate of marriage.’

‘The certificate of marriage!’ cried the Colonel, all aghast.

‘Yes, sir, and this is not the first time I have given this information in confidence. Mrs. Walter Clifford, who is a kind-hearted woman, and has long ceased to suffer bitterly from her husband’s desertion, requested me to warn a young lady whose name was Miss Mary Bartley of this fact. I did so, and showed her the certificate; she was very much distressed, and no wonder, for she was reported to be engaged to Mr. Walter Clifford; but I explained to Miss Bartley that there was no jealousy, hostility, or bitterness in the matter;

the only object was to save her from being betrayed into an illegal act, and one that would bring ruin upon herself and a severe penalty upon Mr. Walter Clifford.'

Colonel Clifford turned very pale, but he merely said in a hoarse voice, 'Go on, sir.'

'Well, sir,' said Monckton, 'I thought the matter was at an end, and, having discharged a commission which was very unpleasant to me, I had at all events saved an innocent girl from tempting Mr. Walter Clifford to his destruction and ruining herself. I say, I thought and hoped so. But it seems now that the young lady has defied the warning, and has married your son after all. Mrs. Walter Clifford has heard of it in Derby, and she is naturally surprised, and I am afraid she is now somewhat incensed.'

'Before we go any further, sir,' said Colonel Clifford, 'I should like to see the certificate you say you showed to Miss Bartley.'

'I did, sir,' said Monckton, 'and here it is, t ht is to say, an attested copy ; but, of course sooner or later you will examine the original.'

Colonel Clifford took the paper with a firm hand, and examined it closely. 'Have you any objection to my taking a copy of this?' said he keenly.

'Of course not,' said Monckton; 'indeed, I don't see why I should not leave this document with you: it will be in honourable hands.'

The Colonel bowed. Then he examined the document.

'I see, sir,' said he, 'the witness is William Hope. May I ask if you know this William Hope?'

'I was not present at the wedding, sir,' said Monckton, 'so I can say nothing about the matter from my own knowledge; but, if you please, I will ask the lady.'

'Why didn't she come herself instead of sending you?' asked the Colonel distrustfully.

'That's just what I asked her; and she said she had not the heart nor the courage to come herself. I believe she thought, as I was a clergyman and not directly interested, I

might be more calm than she could be, and give a little less pain.'

'That's all stuff. If she is afraid to come herself, she knows it's an abominable falsehood. Bring her here with whatever evidence she has got that this Walter Clifford is my son, and then we will go into this matter seriously.'

Monckton was equal to the occasion.

'You are quite right, sir,' said he. 'And what business has she to put me forward as evidence of a transaction I never witnessed? I shall tell her you expect to see her, and that it is her duty to clear up the affair in person. Suppose it should be another Mr. Walter Clifford, after all. When shall I bring her, supposing I have sufficient influence?'

'Bring her to-morrow, as early as you can.'

'Well, you know, ladies are not early risers; will twelve o'clock do?'

'Twelve o'clock to-morrow, sir,' said the Colonel.

The sham parson took his leave, and drove away in a well-appointed carriage and pair.

For we must inform the reader that he had written to Mr. Middleton for another 100*l.*, not much expecting to get it, and that it had come down by return of post in a draft on a bank in Derby.

Stout Colonel Clifford was now a very unhappy man. The soul of honour himself, he could not fully believe that his own son had been guilty of perfidy and crime. But how could he escape *doubts*, and very grave doubts too? The communication was made by a gentleman who did not seem really to know more about it than he had been told; but then he was a clergyman, with no appearance of heat or partiality. He had been easily convinced that the lady herself ought to have come and said more about it, and had left an attested copy of the certificate in his (Colonel Clifford's) hands, with a sort of simplicity that looked like one gentleman dealing with another. One thing, however, puzzled him sore in this certificate—the witness being William Hope.

William Hope was not a very uncommon name, but still, somehow, that one and the same document should contain the names of Walter Clifford and William Hope roused a suspicion in his mind that this witness was the William Hope lying in his own house, so weak and ill that he did not like to go to him, and enter upon such a terrible discussion as this. He sent for Mrs. Milton, and asked her if Mrs. Walter Clifford was quite recovered.

Mrs. Milton reported she was quite well and reading to her father. The Colonel went upstairs and beckoned her out.

‘My child,’ said he, ‘I am sorry to renew an agitating subject, but you are a good girl, and a brave girl, and you mean to confide in me sooner or later. Can you pity the agitation and distress of a father, who for the first time is compelled to doubt his son’s honour?’

‘I can,’ said Grace. ‘Ah, something has happened since we parted; somebody has told you. That man with a certificate?’

‘What, then,’ said the Colonel, ‘is it really

true? Did he really show you that certificate?’

‘He did.’

‘And warned you not to marry Walter?’

‘He did, and told me Walter would be put into prison if I did, and would die in prison, for a gentleman cannot live there now-a-days. Oh, sir, don’t let anybody know but you and me and my father. He won’t hurt him for my sake; he has wronged me cruelly, but I’ll be torn to pieces before I’ll own my marriage, and throw him into a dungeon.’

‘Come to my arms, you pearl of goodness, and nobility, and unselfish love!’ cried Colonel Clifford. ‘How can I ever part with you, now I know you? There, don’t let us despair; let’s fight to the last. I have one question to submit to you. Of course, you examined the certificate very carefully.’

‘I saw enough to break my heart. I saw that on a certain day, many years ago, one Lucy Monckton had married Walter Clifford.’

‘And who witnessed the marriage?’ asked the Colonel, eyeing her keenly.

‘Oh, I don’t know that,’ said Grace. ‘When I came to Walter Clifford, everything swam before my eyes ; it was all I could do to keep from fainting away. I tottered into my father’s study, and, as soon as I came to myself, what had I to do?—Why, to creep out again with my broken heart, and face such insults—Ah! it is a wonder I did not fall dead at their feet.’

‘My poor girl,’ said Colonel Clifford. Then he reflected a moment. ‘Have you the courage to read that document again, and to observe in particular who witnessed it?’

‘I have,’ said she.

He handed it her. She took it and held it in both hands, though they trembled.

‘Who is the witness?’

‘The witness,’ said Grace, ‘is William Hope.’

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‘Is that your father?’

‘It’s my father’s name,’ said Grace, beginning to turn her eyes inwards and think very hard.

‘But is it your father, do you think?’

‘No, sir, it is not.’

‘Was he in that part of the world at the time? Did he know Bartley? The clergyman who brought me this certificate——’

‘The clergyman!’

‘Yes, my dear, it was a clergyman, apparently a rector, and he told me——’

‘Are you sure he was a clergyman?’

‘Quite sure; he had a white tie, a broad-brimmed hat—a clergyman all over; don’t go off on that. Did your father and my son know each other in Hull?’

‘That they did. You are right,’ said Grace. ‘This witness was my father; see that now. But if so—Don’t speak to me, don’t touch me; let me think—there is something hidden here;’ and Mrs. Walter Clifford showed her father-in-law that which we have seen in her more than once, but it was quite new and surprising to Colonel Clifford. There she stood, her arms folded, her eyes turned inward; her every feature, and even her body, seemed to think. The result came out like lightning from a cloud.

‘It’s all a falsehood,’ said she.

‘A falsehood?’ said Colonel Clifford.

‘Yes, a falsehood upon the face of it. My father witnessed this marriage, and therefore, if the bridegroom had been our Walter, he would never have allowed our Walter to court me, for he knew of our courtship all along, and never once disapproved of it.’

‘Then do you think it is a mistake?’ said the Colonel eagerly?

‘No, I do not,’ said Grace. ‘I think it is an imposture. This man was not a clergyman when he brought me the certificate; he was a man of business, a plain tradesman, a man of the world; he had a coloured necktie and some rather tawdry chains.’

‘Did he speak in a kind of sing-song?’

‘Not at all; his voice was clear and cutting, only he softened it down once or twice, out of what I took for good feeling at the time. He’s an impostor and a villain. Dear sir, don’t agitate poor Walter nor my dear father with this vile thing (she handed

him back the certificate). 'It has been a knife to both our hearts; we have suffered together, you and I, and let us get to the bottom of it together.'

'We shall soon do that,' said the Colonel, 'for he is coming here to-morrow again.'

'All the better.'

'With the lady.'

'What lady?'

'The lady that calls herself Mrs. Walter Clifford.'

'Indeed!' said Grace, taken quite aback. 'They must be very bold.'

'Oh, for that matter,' said the Colonel, 'I insisted upon it; the man seemed to know nothing but from mere hearsay. He knew nothing about William Hope, the witness, so I told him he must bring the woman; and, to be just to the man, he seemed to think so too, and that she ought to do her own business.'

'She will not come,' said Grace, rather contemptuously. 'He was obliged to say she

would, just to put a face upon it. To-morrow he'll bring an excuse instead of her. Then have your detectives about, for he is a villain ; and, dear sir, please receive him in the drawing-room ; then I will find some way to get a sight of him myself.'

'It shall be done,' said the Colonel. 'I begin to think with you. At all events, if the lady does not come, I shall hope it is all an imposture or a mistake.'

With this understanding they parted, and waited in anxiety for the morrow, but now their anxiety was chequered with hope.

To-morrow bade fair to be a busy day. Colonel Clifford, little dreaming the condition to which his son and his guest would be reduced, had invited Jim Davies and the rescuing parties to feast in tents on his own lawn, and drink his home-brewed beer, and they were to bring with them such of the rescued miners as might be in a condition to feast and drink copiously. When he found that neither Hope

nor his son could join these festivities. he was very sorry he had named so early a day ; but he was so punctilious and precise, that he could not make up his mind to change one day for another. So a great confectioner at Derby, who sent out feasts, was charged with the affair, and the Colonel's own kitchen was at his service too. That was not all. Bartley was coming to do business. This had been preceded by a letter which Colonel Clifford, it may be remembered, had offered to show Grace Clifford. The letter was thus worded :—

‘COLONEL CLIFFORD,—A penitent man begs humbly to approach you, and offer what compensation is in his power. I desire to pay immediately to Walter Clifford the sum of 20,000*l*. I have so long robbed him of, with five per cent. interest for the use of it. It has brought me far more than that in money, but money, I now find, is not happiness.

‘The mine in which my friend has so nearly

been destroyed, and his daughter, who now, too late, I find is the only creature in the world I love—that mine is now odious to me. I desire by deed to hand it over to Hope and yourself, upon condition that you follow the seams wherever they go, and that you give me such a share of the profits during my lifetime as you think I deserve for my enterprise. This for my life only, since I shall leave all I have in the world to that dear child, who will now be your daughter, and perhaps never deign again to look upon the erring man who writes these lines.

‘I should like, if you please, to retain the farm, or, at all events, a hundred acres round about the house, to turn into orchards and gardens, so that I may have some employment, far from trade and its temptations, for the remainder of my days.’

In consequence of this letter a deed was drawn and engrossed, and Bartley had written to say he would come to Clifford Hall and sign it, and have it witnessed and delivered.

About nine o'clock in the evening one of the detectives called on Colonel Clifford to make a private communication. His mate had spotted a swell mobster, rather a famous character, with the usual number of *aliases*, but known to the force as Mark Waddy ; he was at the Dun Cow, and, possessing the gift of the gab in a superlative degree, had made himself extremely popular. They had both watched him pretty closely, but he seemed not to be there for a job, but only on the talking lay, probably soliciting information for some gang of thieves or other. He had been seen to exchange a hasty word with a clergyman, but as Mark Waddy's acquaintances were not amongst the clergy, that would certainly be some pal that was in some thing or other with him.

'What a shrewd girl that must be !' said the Colonel.

'I beg your pardon, Colonel,' said the man, not seeing the relevancy of this observation.

'Oh, nothing,' said the Colonel, 'only *I* expect a visit to-morrow at twelve o'clock from a

doubtful clergyman ; just hang about the lawn, on the chance of my giving you a signal.'

Thus, while Monckton was mounting his batteries, his victims were preparing defences in a sort of general way, though they did not see their way so clear as the enemy did.

Colonel Clifford's drawing-room was a magnificent room, fifty feet long and thirty feet wide. A number of French windows opened on to a noble balcony, with three short flights of stone steps leading down to the lawn. The central steps were broad, the side steps narrow. There were four entrances to it : two by double doors, and two by heavily-curtained apertures, leading to little subsidiary rooms.

At twelve o'clock next day, what with the burst of colour from the potted flowers on the balcony, the white tents, and the flags and streamers, and a clear, sunshiny day gilding it all, the room looked a 'palace of pleasure,' and no stranger peeping in could have dreamed that it was the abode of care, and about to be visited by gloomy Penitence and incurable Fraud.

The first to arrive was Bartley with a witness. He was received kindly by Colonel Clifford, and ushered into a small room.

He wanted another witness, so John Baker was sent for, and Bartley and he were closeted together, reading the deed, &c., when a footman brought in a card, 'The Reverend Alleyn Meredith,' and written underneath with a pencil, in a female hand, 'Mrs. Walter Clifford.'

'Admit them,' said the Colonel firmly.

At this moment, Grace, who had heard the carriage drive up to the door, peeped in through one of the heavy curtains we have mentioned.

'Has she actually come?' said she.

'She has indeed,' said the Colonel, looking very grave. 'Will you stay and receive her?'

'Oh, no,' said Grace, horrified; 'but I'll take a good look at her through this curtain. I have made a little hole on purpose.' Then she slipped into the little room and drew the curtain.

The servant opened the door, and the false rector walked in, supporting on his arm a

dark woman, still very beautiful—very plainly dressed, but well dressed; agitated, yet self-possessed.

‘Be seated, madam,’ said the Colonel. After a reasonable pause he began to question her :

‘You were married on the eleventh day of June, 1861, to a gentleman of the name of Walter Clifford?’

‘I was, sir.’

‘May I ask how long you lived with him?’

The lady buried her face in her hands. The question took her by surprise, and this was a woman’s artifice to gain time, and answer cleverly.

But the ingenious Monckton gave it a happy turn. ‘Poor thing! poor thing!’ said he.

‘He left me the next day,’ said Lucy, ‘and I have never seen him since.’

Here Monckton interposed; he fancied he had seen the curtain move. ‘Excuse me,’ said he, ‘I think there is somebody listening!’ and

he went swiftly and put his head through the curtain. But the room was empty ; for meantime Grace was so surprised by the lady's arrival, by her beauty, which might well have tempted any man, and by her air of respectability, that she changed her tactics directly, and she was gone to her father for advice and information, in spite of her previous determination not to worry him in his present condition. What he said to her can be briefly told elsewhere ; what he ordered her to do was to return and watch the man, and not the woman.

During Lucy's hesitation, which was somewhat long, a clergyman came to the window, looked in, and promptly retired, seeing the Colonel had company. This, however, was only a modest curate, *alias* a detective. He saw in half a moment that this must be Mark Waddy's pal ; but as the police like to go their own way, he would not watch the lawn himself, but asked Jim Davies, with whom he had made acquaintance, to keep an eye upon that with his fellows, for there was a gaol-bird in

the house. Then he went round to the front door, by which he felt sure his bird would make his exit. He had no earthly right to capture this ecclesiastic, but he was prepared, if the Colonel, who was a magistrate, gave him the order, and not without.

But we are interrupting Colonel Clifford's interrogatories :

‘Madam, what makes you think this disloyal person was my son?’

‘Indeed, sir, I don't know,’ said the lady, and looking around the room with some signs of distress. ‘I begin to hope it was not your son. He was a tall young man, almost as tall as yourself. He was very handsome, with brown hair and brown eyes, and seemed incapable of deceit.’

‘Have you any letters of his?’ asked the Colonel.

‘I had a great many, sir,’ said she, ‘but I have not kept them all.’

‘Have you one?’ said the Colonel sternly.

‘Oh yes, sir,’ said Lucy; ‘I think I must

have nearer twenty ; but what good will they be?' said she, affecting simplicity.

'Why, my dear madam,' said Monckton, 'Colonel Clifford is quite right ; the handwriting may not tell *you* anything, but surely his own father knows it. I think he is offering you a very fair test. I must tell you plainly that, if you don't produce the letters you say you possess, I shall regret having put myself forward in this matter at all.'

'Gently, sir,' said the Colonel ; 'she has not refused to produce them.'

Lucy put her hand in her pocket and drew out a packet of letters ; but she hesitated, and looked timidly at Monckton, after his late severity. 'Am I bound to part with them?'

'Certainly not,' said Monckton, 'but you can surely trust them for a minute to such a man as Colonel Clifford. I am of opinion,' said he, 'that since you cannot be confronted with this gentleman's son (though that is no fault of yours), these letters (by-the-by, it would have been as well to have shown them to me) ought

now at once to be submitted to Colonel Clifford, that he may examine both the contents and the handwriting ; then he will know whether it is his son or not, and probably, as you are fair with him, he will be fair with you and tell you the truth.'

Colonel Clifford took the letters and ran his eye hastily over two or three ; they were filled with the ardent protestations of youth, and a love that evidently looked towards matrimony, and they were written and signed in a handwriting he knew as well as his own.

He said solemnly, ' These letters are written and were sent to Miss Lucy Monckton by my son, Walter Clifford.' Then, almost for the first time in his life, he broke down, and said, ' God forgive him ; God help him, and me ! The honour of the Cliffords is an empty sound.'

Lucy Monckton rose from her chair in genuine agitation. Her better angel tugged at her heart-strings.

'Forgive me, sir—oh, forgive me !' she cried, bursting into tears. Then she caught a bitter,

threatening glance of her bad angel fixed upon her, and she said to Monckton, 'I can say no more; I can do no more. It was fourteen years ago—I can't break people's hearts. Hush it up amongst you. I have made a hero weep; his tears burn me. I don't care for the man; I'll go no further. You, sir, have taken a deal of trouble and expense. I dare say Colonel Clifford will compensate you; I leave the matter with you. No power shall make me act in it any more.'

Monckton wrote hastily on his card, and said quite calmly, 'Well, I really think, madam, you are not fit to take part in such a conference as this. Compose yourself and retire. I know your mind in the matter better than you do yourself at this moment, and I will act accordingly.'

She retired, and drove away to the Dun Cow, which was the place Monckton had appointed when he wrote upon the card.

'Colonel Clifford,' said Monckton, 'all that is a woman's way. When she is out of sight

of you, and thinks over her desertion and her unfortunate condition—neither maid, wife, nor widow—she will be angry with me if I don't obtain her some compensation.'

'She deserves compensation,' said the Colonel gravely.

'Especially if she holds her tongue,' said Monckton.

'Whether she holds her tongue or not,' said the Colonel, 'I don't see how I can hold mine, and you have already told my daughter-in-law. A separation between her and my son is inevitable. The compensation must be offered—and, God help me! I'm a magistrate—if only to compound the felony.'

'Surely,' said Monckton, 'it can be put upon a wider footing than that; let me think,' and he turned away to the open window, but when he got there he saw a lot of miners clustering about. Now, he had no fear of their recognising him, since he had not left a vestige of the printed description. But the very sight of them, and the memory of what they had done

to his dead accomplice, made him shudder at them. Henceforth he kept away from the window, and turned his back to it.

‘I think with you, sir,’ said he, mellifluously, ‘that she ought to have a few thousands by way of compensation. You know she could claim alimony, and be a very blister to you and yours. But, on the other hand, I do think, as an impartial person, that she ought to keep this sad secret most faithfully, and even take her maiden name again.’

Whilst Monckton was making this impartial proposal, Bartley opened the door, and was coming forward with his deed, when he heard a voice he recognised, and partly by that, partly by the fellow’s thin lips, he recognised him, and said, ‘Monckton! That villain here?’

‘Monckton?’ said Colonel Clifford; ‘that is not his name. It is Meredith. He is a clergyman.’ Bartley examined him very suspiciously, and Monckton, during this examination, looked perfectly calm and innocent. Meantime, a note was brought to Colonel Clifford from Grace:

‘Papa was the witness. He is quite sure the bridegroom was not our Walter. He thinks it must have been the other clerk, Leonard Monckton, who robbed Mr. Bartley, and put some of the money into dear Walter’s pockets to ruin him, but papa saved him. Don’t let him escape.’

Colonel Clifford’s eye flashed with triumph, but he controlled himself.

‘Say I will give it due attention,’ said he.
‘I’m busy now.’

And the servant retired.

‘Now, sir,’ said he, ‘is this a case of mistaken identity, or is your name Leonard Monckton?’

‘Colonel Clifford,’ said the hypocrite sadly, ‘I little thought that I should be made to suffer for the past, since I came here only on an errand of mercy. Yes, sir, in my unregenerate days I was Leonard Monckton. I disgraced the name. But I repented, and when I adopted the sacred calling of a clergyman I parted with the past, name and all. I was that man’s clerk, and so,’ said he spitefully, and forgetting his sing-song,

‘was your son, Walter Clifford. Was that not so, Mr. Bartley?’

‘Don’t speak to me, sir,’ said Bartley. ‘I shall say nothing to gratify you nor to affront Colonel Clifford.’

‘Speak the truth, sir,’ said Colonel Clifford; ‘never mind the consequences.’

‘Well, then,’ said Bartley, very unwillingly, ‘they *were* clerks in my office; and this one robbed me.’

‘One thing at a time,’ said Monckton. ‘Did I rob you of twenty thousand pounds as you robbed Mr. Walter Clifford?’

His voice became still more incisive, and the curtain of the little room opened a little, and two eyes of fire looked in.

‘Do you remember one fine day your clerk, Walter Clifford, asking you for leave of absence—to be married?’

Bartley turned his back on him contemptuously.

But Colonel Clifford insisted on his replying.

‘Yes, he did,’ said Bartley sullenly.

‘But,’ said the Colonel quietly, ‘he thought better of it, and so—you married her yourself.’

This bayonet thrust was so keen and sudden that the villain’s self-possession left him for once. His mouth opened in dismay, and his eyes, roving to and fro, seemed to seek a door to escape.

But there was worse in store for him. The curtains were drawn right and left with power, and there stood Grace Clifford, beautiful, but pale and terrible. She marched towards him with eyes that rooted him to the spot. And then she stopped.

‘Now, hear *me*; for he has tortured me, and tried to kill me. Look at his white face turning ghastly beneath his paint at the sight of me; look at his thin lips, and his devilish eyebrows, and his restless eyes. **THIS IS THE MAN THAT BRIBED THAT WRETCH TO FIRE THE MINE!**’

These last words, ringing from her lips like the trumpet of doom, were answered, as swiftly as gunpowder explodes at a lighted torch, by a furious yell, and in a moment the room seemed

a forest of wild beasts. A score of raging miners came upon him from every side, dragging, tearing, beating, kicking, cursing, yelling. He was down in a moment, then soon up again, then dragged out of the room, nails, fists, and heavy boots all going, stripped to the shirt, screaming like a woman. A dozen assailants rolled down the steps with him in the midst of them. He got clear for a moment, but twenty more rushed at him, and again he was torn and battered and kicked. ‘Police! police!’ he cried, and at last the detectives who came to seize him rushed in, and Colonel Clifford, too, with the voice of a stentor, cried, ‘The law! respect the law, or you are ruined men!’”

And so at last the Law he had so dreaded raised what seemed a bag of bones. Nothing left on him but one boot and fragments of a shirt—ghastly, bleeding, covered with bruises, insensible, and to all appearance dead.

After a short consultation, they carried him by Colonel Clifford’s order to the Dun Cow, where Lucy, it may be remembered, was awaiting his triumphant return.

CHAPTER XXVI.

STRANGE TURNS.

AND yet this catastrophe rose out of a mistake. When the detective asked Jim Davies to watch the lawn, he never suspected that the clergyman was the villain who had been concerned in that explosion. But Davies, a man of few ideas and full of his own wrongs, took for granted, as such minds will, that the policeman would not have spoken to him if this had not been *his* affair; so he and his fellows gathered about the steps and watched the drawing-room. They caught a glimpse of Monckton, but that only puzzled them. His appearance was inconsistent with the only description they had got—in fact, opposed to it. It was Grace Clifford's denunciation, trumpet-tongued, that

let loose savage justice on the villain. Never was a woman's voice so fatal or so swift to slay. She would have undone her work. She screamed, she implored. But it was all in vain ; the fury she had launched she could not recall. As for Bartley, words can hardly describe his abject terror. He crouched, he shivered, he moaned, he almost swooned ; and, long after it was all over, he was found crouched in a corner of the little room, and his very reason appeared to be shaken. Judge Lynch had passed him, but too near. The freezing shadow of Retribution chilled him.

Colonel Clifford looked at him with contemptuous pity, and sent him home with John Baker in a close carriage.

Lucy Monckton was in the parlour of the Dun Cow, waiting for her master. The detectives and some outdoor servants of Clifford Hall brought a short ladder and palliasses and something covered with blankets to

the door. Lucy saw, but did not suspect the truth.

They had a murmured consultation with the landlady. During this Mark Waddy came down, and there was some more whispering, and soon the battered body was taken up to Mark Waddy's room, and deposited on his bed. The detectives retired to consult, and Waddy had to break the calamity to Mrs. Monckton. He did this as well as he could; but it little matters how such blows are struck. Her agony was great, and greater when she saw him, for she resisted entirely all attempts to keep her from him. She installed herself at once as his nurse, and Mark Waddy retired to a garret.

A surgeon came by Colonel Clifford's order, and examined Monckton's bruised body, and shook his head. He reported that there were no bones broken, but there were probably grave internal injuries. These, however, he could not specify at present, since there was no sensibility in the body; so pressure on the

injured parts elicited no groans. He prescribed egg and brandy in small quantities, and showed Mrs. Monckton how to administer it to a patient in that desperate condition.

His last word was in private to Waddy. 'If he ever speaks again, or even groans aloud, send for me. Otherwise——' and he shrugged his shoulders.

Some hours afterwards Colonel Clifford called, as a magistrate, to see if the sufferer had any deposition to make. But he was mute and his eyes fixed.

As Colonel Clifford returned, one of the detectives accosted him and asked him for a warrant to arrest him.

'Not in his present condition,' said Colonel Clifford, rather superciliously. 'And pray, sir, why did not you interfere sooner and prevent this lawless act?'

'Well, sir, unfortunately we were on the other side of the house.'

'Exactly; you had orders to be in one place, so you must be in another. See the

consequence. The honest men have put themselves in the wrong, and this fellow in the right. He will die a sort of victim, with his guilt suspected only, not proved.'

Having thus snubbed the Force, the old soldier turned his back on them and went home, where Grace met him, all anxiety, and received his report. She implored him not to proceed any further against the man, and declared she should fly the country rather than go into a court of law as witness against him.

'Humph!' said the Colonel; 'but you are the only witness.'

'All the better for him,' said she. 'Then he will die in peace. My tongue has killed the man once; it shall never kill him again.'

About six next morning Monckton beckoned Lucy. She came eagerly to him. He whispered to her, 'Can you keep a secret?'

'You know I can,' said she.

'Then never let anyone know I have spoken.'

'No, dear, never. Why?'

‘I dread the law more than death,’ and he shuddered all over. ‘Save me from the law.’

‘Leonard, I will,’ said she. ‘Leave that to me.’

She wired for Mr. Middleton as soon as possible.

The next day there was no change in the patient. He never spoke to anybody, except a word or two to Lucy, in a whisper, when they were quite alone.

In the afternoon down came Lawyer Middleton. Lucy told him what he knew; but Monckton would not speak, even to him. He had to get hold of Waddy before he understood the whole case.

Waddy was in Monckton’s secret, and, indeed, in everybody’s. He knew it was folly to deceive your lawyer, so he was frank. Mr. Middleton learned his client’s guilt and danger, but also that his enemies had flaws in their armour.

The first shot he fired was to get warrants

out against a dozen miners, Jim Davies included, for a murderous assault ; but he made no arrests, he only summoned. So one or two took fright and fled. Middleton had counted on that, and it made the case worse for those that remained. Then, by means of friends in Derby, he worked the press.

An article appeared, headed ‘ Our Savages.’ It related with righteous indignation how Mr. Bartley’s miners had burned the dead body of a miner suspected of having fired the mine, and put his own life in jeopardy as well as those of others ; and then, not content with that monstrous act, had fallen upon and beaten to death a gentleman in whom they thought they detected a resemblance to some person who had been, or was suspected of being, that miner’s accomplice ; ‘ but so far from that,’ said the writer, ‘ we are now informed, on sure authority, that the gentleman in question is a large and wealthy landed proprietor, quite beyond any temptation to crime or dishonesty, and had actually visited this part of the world

only in the character of a peacemaker, and to discharge a very delicate commission which it would not be our business to publish even if the details had been confided to us.'

The article concluded with a hope that these monsters 'would be taught that, even if they were below the standard of humanity, they were not above the law.'

Middleton attended the summonses, gave his name and address, and informed the magistrate that his client was a large landed proprietor, and it looked like a case of mistaken identity. His client was actually dying of his injuries; but his wife hoped for justice.

But the detectives had taken care to be present, and so they put in their word. They said that they were prepared to prove, at a proper time, that the wounded man was really the person who had been heard by Mrs. Walter Clifford to bribe Ben Burnley to fire the mine.

'We have nothing to do with that now,' said the magistrate. 'One thing at a time, please. I cannot let these people murder a

convicted felon, far less a suspected criminal that has not been tried. The wounded man proceeds, according to law, through a respectable attorney. These men, whom you are virtually defending, have taken the law into their own hands. Are your witnesses here, Mr. Middleton ?’

‘Not at present, sir; and when I was interrupted I was about to ask your worship to grant me an adjournment for that purpose. It will not be a great hardship to the accused, since we proceed by summons. I fear I have been too lenient; for two or three of them have absconded since the summons was served.’

‘I am not surprised at that,’ said the magistrate; ‘however, you know your own business.’

Then the police applied for a warrant of arrest against Monckton.

‘Oh,’ cried Middleton, with the air of a man thoroughly shocked and scandalised.

‘Certainly not,’ said the magistrate, ‘I

shall not disturb the course of justice ; there is not even an *ex parte* case against this gentleman at present. Such an application must be supported by a witness, and a disinterested one.' So all the parties retired crestfallen except Mr. Middleton ; as for him, he was imitating a small but ingenious specimen of nature—the cuttle-fish. This little creature, when pursued by its enemies, discharges an inky fluid, which obscures the water all around, and then it starts off and escapes.

One dark night, at two o'clock in the morning, there came to the door of the Dun Cow an invalid carriage, or rather omnibus, with a spring bed and every convenience. The wheels were covered thick with india-rubber, relays had been provided, and Monckton and his party rolled along day and night to Liverpool. The detectives followed six hours later, and traced them to Liverpool very cleverly, and with the assistance of the police raked the town for them, and got all the great steamers watched, especially those that were

bound Westward Ho! But their bird was at sea, in a Liverpool merchant's own steam-boat, hired for a two months' trip. The pursuers found this out too, but a fortnight too late.

'It's no go, Bill,' said one to the other. 'There's a lawyer and a pot of money against us. Let it sleep awhile.'

The steamboat coasted England in beautiful weather. The sick man began to revive, and to eat a little, and to talk a little, and to suffer a good deal at times. Before they had been long at sea, Mr. Middleton had a confidential conversation with Mrs. Monckton. He told her he had been very secret with her for her good. 'I saw,' said he, 'this Monckton had no deep regard for you, and was capable of turning you adrift in prosperity; and I knew that, if I told you everything, you would let it out to him, and tempt him to play the villain. But the time is come that I must speak, in justice to you both. That estate he left your son half in joke is virtually

his. Fourteen years ago, when he last looked into the matter, there *were* eleven lives between it and him ; but, strange to say, whilst he was at Portland, the young lives went one after the other, and there were really only five left when he made that will. Now comes the extraordinary part : a fortnight ago three of those lives perished in a single steamboat accident on the Clyde ; that left a woman of eighty-two, and a man of ninety between your husband and the estate. The lady was related to the persons who were drowned, and she has since died ; she had been long ailing, and it is believed that the shock was too much for her. The survivor is the actual proprietor, old Carruthers ; but I am the London agent to his solicitor, and he was reported to me to be *in extremis* the very day before I left London to join you. We shall run into a port near the place, and you will not land, but I shall, and obtain precise information. In the meantime, mind your husband's name is Carruthers. Any communication from me

will be to Mrs. Carruthers, and you will tell that man as much or as little as you think proper; if you make any disclosure, give yourself all the credit you can; say you shall take him to his own house, under a new name, and shield him against all pursuers. As for me, I tell you plainly, my great hope is that he will not live long enough to turn you adrift and disinherit your boy.'

To cut short for the present this extraordinary part of our story, Lewis Carruthers, *alias* Leonard Monckton, entered a fine house, and took possession of 11,000 acres of hilly pasture, and the undivided moiety of a lake brimful of fish. He accounted for his change of name by the favours Carruthers, deceased, had shown him. Therein he did his best to lie, but his present vein of luck turned it into the truth. Old Carruthers had become so peevish that all his relations disliked him, and he disliked them. So he left his personal estate to his heir-at-law, simply because he had never seen him. The personalty was very large.

The house was full of pictures and china and cabinets, &c. There was a large balance at the banker's, a heavy fall of timber not paid for, rents due, and as many as two thousand four hundred sheep upon that hill, which the old fellow had kept in his own hands. So, when the new proprietor took possession as Carruthers, nobody was surprised, though many were furious. Lucy installed him in a grand suite of apartments as an invalid, and let nobody come near him. Waddy was dismissed with a munificent present, and could be trusted to hold his tongue. By the advice of Middleton not a single servant was dismissed, and so no enemies were made. The family lawyer and steward were also retained, and, in short, all conversation was avoided. In a month or two the new proprietor began to improve in health, and drive about his own grounds, or be rowed on his lake, lying on soft beds.

But in the fifth month of his residence local pains seized him, and he began to waste. For some time the precise nature of the disorder

was obscure, but at last a rising surgeon declared it to be an abscess in the intestines (caused, no doubt, by external violence).

By degrees the patient became unable to take solid food, and the drain upon his system was too great for a mere mucilaginous diet to sustain him. Wasted to the bone and yellow as a guinea, he presented a pitiable spectacle, and would gladly have exchanged his fine house and pictures, his heathery hills dotted with sheep, and his glassy lake full of spotted trout, for a ragged Irishman's bowl of potatoes and his mug of butter-milk, and his stomach.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CURTAIN.

STRIKING incidents will draw the writer ; but we know that our readers would rather hear about the characters they can respect ; it seems, however, to be a rule in life, and in fiction, that interest flags when trouble ceases. Now the troubles of our good people were pretty well over, and we will put it to the reader whether they had not enough.

Grace Clifford made an earnest request to Colonel Clifford and her father never to tell Walter he had been suspected of bigamy. 'Let others say that circumstances are always to be believed and character not to be trusted ; but I, at least, had no right to believe certificates and things against my Walter's honour and his love. Hide my fault from him, not

for my sake but for his ; perhaps when we are both old people I may tell him.'

This was Grace Clifford's petition, and need we say she prevailed ?

Walter Clifford recovered under his wife's care, and the house was so large that Colonel Clifford easily persuaded his son and daughter-in-law to make it their home. Hope had also two rooms in it, and came there when he chose—he was always welcome ; but he was alone again, so to speak, and not quite forty years of age, and he was ambitious. He began to rise in the world, whilst our younger characters, contented with their happiness and position, remained stationary. Master of a great mine, able now to carry out his inventions, member of several scientific associations, a writer for the scientific press, &c., he soon became a public and eminent man ; he was consulted on great public works, and if he lives will be one of the great lights of science in this island. He is great on electricity, especially on the application of natural forces

to the lighting of towns. He denounces all the cities that allow powerful streams to run past them and not work a single electric light. But he goes farther than that. He ridicules the idea that it is beyond the resources of science to utilise thousands of millions of tons of water that are raised twenty-one feet twice in every twenty-four hours by the tides. It is the skill to apply the force that is needed : not the force itself, which exceeds that of all the steam-engines in the nation. And he says that the great scientific foible of the day is the neglect of natural forces which are cheap and inexhaustible, and the mania for steam-engines and gas which are expensive, and for coal, which is not to last for ever. He implores capital and science to work in this question. His various schemes for using the tides in the creation of motive power will doubtless come before the world in a more appropriate channel than a work of fiction. If he succeeds it will be a glorious, as it must be a difficult, achievement.

His society is valued on social grounds ; his well-stored mind, his powers of conversation, and his fine appearance, make him extremely welcome at all the tables in the county ; he also accompanies his daughter with the violin, and, as they play beauties together, not difficulties, they ravish the souls of their hearers, instead of torturing them into despair.

Bartley is a man with beautiful silvery hair and beard ; he cultivates, nurses and tends fruit trees and flowers with a love little short of paternal. This sentiment, and the contemplation of nature, have changed the whole expression of his face ; it is wonderfully benevolent and sweet, but with a touch of weakness about the lips. Some of the rough fellows about the place call him a softy, but that is too strong a word ; no doubt, he is confused in his ideas, but he reads all the great American publications about fruit and flowers, and executes their instructions with tact and skill. Where he breaks down—and

who would believe this?—is in the trade department. Let him succeed in growing apple trees and pear trees weighed down to the ground with choice fruit; let him produce the choicest cherries and gigantic nectarines upon his sunny walls, and acres of strawberries too large for the mouth: after that they may all rot where they grow, he troubles his head no more. This is more than his old friend, Hope, can stand; he interferes, and sends the fruit to market, and fills great casks with superlative cider and perry, and keeps the account square, with a little help from Mrs. Easton, who has returned to her old master, and is a firm but kind mother to him.

Grace Clifford for some time could not be got to visit him. Perhaps she is one of those ladies who cannot get over personal violence; he had handled her roughly to keep her from going to her father's help. After all, there may have been other reasons; it is not so easy to penetrate all the recesses of the female heart. One thing is certain, she would not go

near him for months; but when she did go with her father—and he had to use all his influence to take her there—the rapture and the tears of joy with which the poor old fellow received her disarmed her in a moment.

She let him take her through hot-houses and show her his children—‘the only children I have now,’ said he—and after that she never refused to visit this erring man. His roof had sheltered her many years, and he had found out too late that he loved her, so far as his nature could love at that time.

Percy Fitzroy had an elder sister. He appealed to her against Julia Clifford. She cross-questioned him, and told him he was very foolish to despair. She would hardly have slapped him—she was quite resolved to part for ever.

‘Let me have a hand in reconciling you,’ said she.

‘You shall have b—b—both hands in it, if

you like,' said he; 'for I am at my w—w—wit's end.'

So these two conspired. Miss Fitzroy was invited to Percy's house, and played the mistress. She asked other young ladies, especially that fair girl with auburn hair, whom Julia called a 'fat thing.' That meant, under the circumstances, a plump and rounded model, with small hands and feet; a perfect figure in a riding habit, and at night a satin bust and sculptured arms.

The very first ride Walter took with Grace and Julia, they met the bright cavalcade of Percy and his sister, and this red-haired Venus.

Percy took off his hat with profound respect to Julia and Grace, but did not presume to speak.

'What a lovely girl,' said Grace.

'Do you think so?' said Julia.

'Yes, dear; and so do you.'

'What makes you fancy that?'

'Because you looked daggers at her.'

'Because she is setting her cap at that little fool.'

‘She will not have him without your consent, dear.’

And this set Julia thinking.

The next day, Walter called on Percy, and played the traitor.

‘Give a ball,’ said he.

Miss Fitzroy and her brother gave a ball. Percy, duly instructed by his sister, wrote to Julia as meek as Moses, and said he was in a great difficulty. If he invited her, it would, of course, seem presumptuous, considering the poor opinion she had of him; if he passed her over and invited Walter Clifford and Mrs. Clifford, he should be unjust to his own feelings, and seem disrespectful.

Julia’s reply :

‘DEAR MR. FITZROY,—I am not at all fond of jealousy, but I am very fond of dancing : I shall come.—Yours sincerely,

‘JULIA CLIFFORD.’

And she did come—with a vengeance. She showed them what a dark beauty can do in

a blaze of light with a red rose, and a few thousand pounds worth of diamonds artfully placed.

She danced with several partners, and took Percy in his turn. She was gracious to him, but nothing more.

Percy asked leave to call next day.

She assented rather coldly.

His sister prepared Percy for the call.

The first thing he did was to stammer intolerably.

‘Oh,’ said Julia. ‘If you have nothing more to say than that—I have. Where is my bracelet?’

‘It’s here,’ said Percy, producing it eagerly. Julia smiled.

‘My necklace?’

‘Here!’

‘My charms?’

‘Here!’

‘My specimens of your spelling? Love spells, eh?’

‘Here, all here.’

‘No, they are not,’ said Julia, snatching them, ‘they are here.’ And she stuffed both her pockets with them.

‘And the engaged ring,’ said Percy, radiant now, and producing it, ‘d—d—don’t forget that.’

Julia began to hesitate. ‘If I put that on, it will be for life.’

‘Yes, it will,’ said Percy.

‘Then give me a moment to think.’

After due consideration she said what she had made up her mind to say long before :

‘Percy, you’re a man of honour. I’ll be yours upon one solemn condition—that from this hour till death parts us, you promise to give your faith where you give your love.’

‘I’ll give my faith where I give my love,’ said Percy solemnly.

Next month they were married, and he gave his confidence where he gave his love, and he never had reason to regret it.

‘John Baker.’

‘Sir.’

‘You had better mind what you are about, or you’ll get fonder of her than of Walter himself.’

‘Never, Colonel, never ! And so will you.’

Then, after a moment’s reflection, John Baker inquired how they were to help it. ‘Look here, Colonel,’ said he, ‘a man’s a man ; but a woman’s a woman. It isn’t likely as Master Walter will always be putting his hand round your neck and kissing of you when you’re good, and pick a white hair off your coat if he do but see one when you’re going out, and shine upon you indoors more than the sun does on you out of doors ; and ’tain’t to be supposed as Mr. Walter will never meet me on the stairs without breaking out into a smile to cheer an old fellow’s heart, and showing 2,000*l.* worth of ivory all at one time ; and if I’ve a cold or a bit of a headache he won’t send his lady’s maid to see after me and tell

me what I am to do, and threaten to come and nurse me himself if I don't mend.'

'Well,' said the Colonel, 'there's something in all this.'

'For all that,' said John Baker candidly, 'I shall make you my confession, sir. I said to Mr. Walter myself, said I, "Here's a pretty business," said I; "I've known and loved you from a child, and Mrs. Walter has only been here six months, and now I'm afraid she'll make me love her more than I do you."'

"'Why, of course she will,'" said Mr. Walter. 'Why *I* love her better than I do myself, and, you've got to follow suit or else I'll murder you.'"

So that question was settled.

The five hundred guineas reward rankled in the minds of those detectives, and, after a few months, with the assistance of the ordinary police in all the northern towns, they got upon a cold scent and then upon a warm scent, and at last they suspected their bird, under the *alias*

of Carruthers. So they came to the house to get sight of him, and make sure before applying for a warrant. They got there just in time for his funeral. Middleton was there, and saw them, and asked them to attend it, and to speak to him after the reading of the will.

‘Proceedings are stayed,’ said he; ‘but perhaps, having acted against me, you might like to see whether it would not pay better to act with me.’

‘And no mistake,’ said one of them: so they were feasted with the rest, for it was a magnificent funeral, and after that Middleton squared them with 50*l.* apiece to hold their tongues—and more, to divert all suspicion from the house and the beautiful woman who now held it as only trustee for her son.

Remembering that he had left the estate to another man’s child, Monckton one fine day bequeathed his personal estate on half a sheet of note-paper to Lucy. This and the large allowance Middleton obtained from the Court

for her, as trustee and guardian to the heir, made her a rich woman. She was a German, sober, notable, and provident; she kept her sheep, and became a sort of squire. She wrote to her husband in the States, and, by the advice of Middleton, told him the exact truth instead of a pack of fibs which she certainly would have done had she been left to herself. Poverty had pinched Jonathan Braham by this time, and as he saw by the tone of her letter she did not care one straw whether he accepted the situation or not, he accepted it eagerly, and had to court her as a stranger and to marry her, and wear the crown matrimonial; for Middleton drew the settlements, and neither Braham nor his creditors could touch a half-penny. And then came out the better part of this indifferent woman. Braham had been a good friend to her in time of need, and she was a good and faithful friend to him now. She was generally admired and respected; kind to the poor; bountiful, but not lavish: an excellent manager, but not stingy.

In vain shall we endeavour with our small insight into the bosoms of men and women to divide them into the good and the bad. There are mediocre intellects ; there are mediocre morals. This woman was always more inclined to good than evil, yet at times temptation conquered. She was virtuous till she succumbed to a seducer whom she loved. Under his control she deceived Walter Clifford and attempted an act of downright villainy ; that control removed, she returned to virtuous and industrious habits. After many years, solitude, weariness, and a gloomy future unhinged her conscience again : comfort and affection offered themselves, and she committed bigamy. Deserted by Braham, and once more fascinated by the only man she had ever greatly loved, she joined him in an abominable fraud, broke down in the middle of it by a sudden impulse of conscience, and soon after settled down into a faithful nurse. She is now a faithful wife, a tender mother, a kind mistress, and nearly

everything that is good in a medium way, and so in all human probability will pass the remainder of her days, which, as she is healthy and sober in eating and drinking, will perhaps be the longer period of her little life.

Well may we all pray against great temptations; only choice spirits resist them, except when they are great temptations to somebody else and somehow not to the person tempted.

It has lately been objected to the writers of fiction—especially to those few who are dramatists as well as novelists—that they neglect what Shakespeare calls ‘The middle of humanity,’ and deal in eccentric characters above or below the people one really meets. Let those who are serious in this objection enjoy moral mediocrity in the person of Lucy Monckton.

For our part we will never place Fiction, which was the parent of History, below its child. Our hearts are with those superior men and women, who, whether in History or Fic-

tion, make life beautiful, and raise the standard of Humanity. Such characters exist even in this plain tale, and it is these alone, and our kindly readers, we take leave of with regret.

THE END.

G. & C.

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118





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